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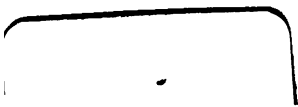
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A decorative floral ornament consisting of four stylized roses arranged in a square pattern, with swirling vine-like lines connecting them.

# BACHELOR BETTY

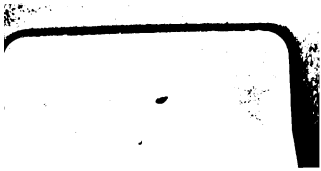
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A decorative floral ornament consisting of four stylized roses arranged in a square pattern, with swirling vine-like lines connecting them.



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**BACHELOR BETTY.**



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# Bachelor Betty

BY  
WINIFRED JAMES

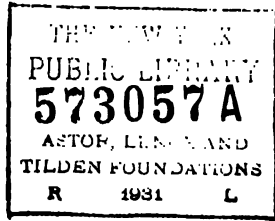
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**1907**

RAY VON  
CLUB  
MAGAZ

TO  
CONSTANCE SMEDLEY  
AND ONE OTHER  
WHO HAVE HELPED ME

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# BACHELOR BETTY

## CHAPTER I

To me the morning had been a most absorbing one. I had successfully painted my last summer hat navy blue, and was busy trimming it with the silk stripped from a cast-off race parasol of Aunt Julie's, when the latch clicked and Maria (after an aunt of that name) walked in. She had been staying the night at Aunt Julie's.

"Well," she said, sinking down into the one comfortable chair—I wasn't in it, because I always have to stand to do anything serious—then she caught sight of the hat. "Where did you get that?"

It was a silly question to ask. The smell of a hand-painted hat is enough to advertise its origin anywhere; but I afterwards discovered the reason for Maria's want of observation. I explained patiently.

"Really, Betty," she said graciously, "you are very clever with your fingers."

By that I knew that something unusual must



have happened. It is not natural for Maria to be so fulsome. I waited for the reason to unfold itself. There was a pause, during which she removed her hat and ruffled her hair. She is certainly very lovely.

"I am going to marry Roger," she said at last.

Now if ever there's a dear in the shape of a man it's Roger. He's not very young—about forty or more—but he's big and kind and protecting, and has a child-like faith in the goodness of woman that is refreshing, but very pathetic. Beside that he has eight thousand a year, and to a girl with expensive tastes and an empty pass-book that would not go against him.

He has been in love with her for three years without a break. Lately I have seen her evincing a growing distaste for the simplicity, not to say scantiness, of our housekeeping arrangements, therefore I had a pretty shrewd idea that his chances of footing Maria's bills at an early date were fairly healthy. This last visit to Aunt Julie must have finished it.

"I am very glad," I said, "*very* glad. If I had thought there was any hope of him swerving in his affection I should have covered him with a matrimonial eye myself. I don't know that it wouldn't have been a better arrangement, for it strikes me you don't quite know how to appreciate him. As it is, I am glad he will be kept in the family."

Maria smiled—a sweet, sad, fleeting smile that

haunts you if you are not related to her and only judge from externals. It sets people wondering what the grief can be that is secretly consuming one so young and highly favoured, and makes them long to do something for her before she dies of it. As a matter of fact, I don't think she ever—apart from natural objection to poverty—felt more than two emotions in her life. One, annoyance that her name is Maria; and the other, repugnance to done-up meat, a dish not unknown to us. Yet on account of the shape of her eyes, and of an expression that has only strayed on to her face by accident, and has nothing whatever to do with her mental condition, she commands a sympathy that a plain, round-faced woman, with a real heroic sorrow, might yearn her heart out for. It makes me tired when I hear people say that eyes are the windows of the soul.

“You do say such odd things, Betty,” she said, with the smile, then she went on dreamily, “Aunt Julie is going to give me my trousseau, and, of course, I am to be married from Hazlewood, and you and the Marrable girls are to be bridesmaids, besides Roger's two nieces. Then when we come back you are to spend half the year with us and half with Aunt Julie, because you won't be able to stay on here alone——”

I let her go on talking because I was aching to know what the bridesmaids were going to wear, and I didn't want to open up a subject over which

it looked as if there would be much blood shed. But live six months with Aunt Julie! Not much! She's nice for week-ends, but that's about the limit—for Betty anyhow. Maria loves it. I should die of suffocation in a week if I went with the fore-knowledge that I could not escape under six months. I love sleeping in a room that has a marble-fitted bath-room attached. I love stepping from a bed of down across Wilton pile to a dressing-table glittering with silver fittings. I love having a clever-fingered maid to fasten my frock and button my boots—when they aren't too shabby—but I hate long dinners between pompous city merchants, who never open their mouths except to put something in them or to talk weary politics, and I hate long, silent evenings spent over exhausting games of bridge when I don't know the back from the front of a card, and am longing to spirit the soul out of the neglected Steinway, that waits dumbly in a shaded corner of the big drawing-room.

No, I shall sit very tight and let them arrange while I am finding a way.

In the meantime there are the bridesmaids' frocks, and Roger says I am to choose the presents.

The darling!

## CHAPTER II

It is all over. Maria is married and back from her honeymoon, and I have got my own way, which is to go to England and write, and to-morrow the ship sails.

At first every one was dead against it. Aunt Julie held up her hands in horror and said, "The thing is impossible. Betty must be remonstrated with!" Uncle John said, "Yes, you are right, Julie," and never thought any more about it. Maria said succinctly, "Betty, you are a fool; six months of it will make you an old woman," and Roger said, "Betty, dear, do you think you quite know what you are in for? You will be very lonely; wouldn't it be wiser to give up the idea of working for yourself, and live with your sister and me? You know you are very welcome."

The dear old thing! He didn't know that it is sweeter to have a garret you can call your own than to live in a palace that belongs to some one else. How should he? He has always had his own palace.

So I just said, "You dear man, you are the only one with any sense, listen while I explain," and he

laughed and said, "Go ahead," and I proceeded. I told him I had lived too long on my own to be able to be content with any other way. I said while I should love to stay with him and Maria sometimes, the very thought of more than two or three days at Aunt Julie's made me gasp for air. I had got the opinion of the editors I had worked for, and as far as work was concerned they all advised me to go. There was nothing to keep me but the ignorant prejudices of people like Aunt Julie, who disapproved of women working for a living, but who could offer no solution as to how they could live without.

"You should get married, Betty," said Roger; "it is the best life for any one, and especially for women; they aren't made to battle for themselves."

When he said that, I felt suddenly very lonely. I knew he was speaking the truth. There is not one woman in a hundred who chooses an independent life because she prefers it. She may prefer it to starvation, she may prefer it to being buried alive or to living in dependent ease with uncongenial people, but the one who honestly does it for the love of it has got to be searched for long and laboriously. Perhaps I looked sorry for myself, for he went on very quickly, "Do whatever you think best, dear. You are quite old enough to decide for yourself, and I will do everything I can to help you. I am sure Mary will think the same when she considers the matter."

He said Mary so tenderly and protectingly that it gave me a sharp envious pain. Why should I, who secretly want to be petted and nursed and fussed over, have to choose between a cramping dependence and a tremendous isolation? For the moment I felt very desolate. Then I laughed. What was the use of me imagining I had a tragedy? I wasn't the right shape for it; it was ridiculous.

"Roger," I said, when the lump had eased out of my throat, "I don't know how to describe you. You're too young for a father, not interfering enough for a brother, and altogether too nice for a relation of any sort. I hope this little affair between you and Maria won't make you feel it necessary to become one. For the rest, I rely upon you to square Aunt Julie."

He just did everything. He talked to Aunt Julie till she said to Uncle John, "After all, perhaps it is as well that Betty should go. She is considered clever, but as she is not exceptionally beautiful, like Maria, it is very improbable that she will make anything of a marriage." And Uncle John said, as usual, "I quite agree with you, Julie," and strolled down to the kitchen garden to see how the asparagus was coming on. And he talked to Maria till she came and said—"I'm sure you will get on, Betty; everybody says you are clever, and you always make friends wherever you go, and you know if you don't like it you can come back again," which was simply an overpowering

speech for Maria to make. Then for a long time he wouldn't hear of me travelling second-class, but I insisted. I didn't quite see why, because he had done his duty nobly and married Maria, he should also find he had married the family, so, after a great to-do, he went to the shipping office, and as it was not quite the season for travelling he arranged for me to have a four-berth cabin to myself on one of the new big liners, and he has sent a cane lounge and a deck-chair, and a big opossum rug, and some boxes of sweets down to the ship to be ready for me to-morrow. When I get to London I shall have about enough to starve upon till something happens. Maria handed over her share of our "estate," which was very decent of her, because, although Roger has settled a thousand a year on her, it is my experience that very often people who have been quite generous with pounds when they only had pence to deal with, become suddenly careful of pence when they have pounds and hundreds of pounds at their disposal. Beside that she has helped me with my trousseau.

It seems odd to think of what begins with to-morrow.

## CHAPTER III

It is over a fortnight since we left, and to-morrow or the day after we get to Colombo.

Roger and Maria, and the Marrable girls and Tony, and ever so many others came to see me off. It was all very exciting. Everybody was on the same deck, and there was a tremendous lot of leave-taking and laughing and crying, and officers giving orders and sailors executing them, and presently the bell clanged, and a sailor called out, "All visitors for the shore," and the laughing and crying and kissing and hand-shaking began afresh, and I kissed everybody, including Tony Marrable. Then the bell clanged violently again, and all those who weren't going swarmed down the gangway on to the pier, and those who were took the best places they could find at the side of the ship to see the last of home for a long time. The gangway was hauled up, the moorings, or whatever you call those loop things that go over the posts, were unhitched, and we swung slowly out away from the wharf. I stood and waved till the crowd on the end of the pier had become merely an indistinct mass of fluttering handkerchiefs, and then I went below to fix



up. Before Maria left she put an envelope into my hand and said, "This is an introduction to your banker from Roger." I said, "Thank you," but I didn't think any more about it. When I got down to the cabin I opened it. It was a draft for fifty pounds, "in case you get measles and have to call in assistance." He is a brick.

I had just unstrapped my rug-roll, and taken out the eider-down Aunt Julie gave me—because although it was only the second week in December, and the very middle of the summer, I knew there would often be cold nights—when the cabin steward came in to tell me every one was at dinner—dinner at one-thirty, isn't it sickening? That's one of the joys of travelling second-class.

I gave him a big basket of La France roses, and another of dahlias to put on the table in the saloon, and after I had put the rest into water I went to dinner. In between the courses I had a look round. From what I could see the prospects at my table didn't look too rosy, but you never can tell who or what your companions will be till you leave Australia altogether. So many get off at Adelaide and West Australia.

After that meal very few of us met again until we arrived at Adelaide. A storm came on when we got outside the Heads, and I retired to the fastnesses of my four-berth cabin, and between the paroxysms prayed unceasingly for thirty-six hours to Heaven to take me. By that time we had

anchored in Largs Bay. The ship was quite still, and when I looked out of the port-hole and saw a world that was nothing but blue sky and sparkling, glittering wavelets, I felt it must be breakfast time. I got up, had my bath, dressed and ate a rattling good breakfast, so that when Roger's friend called for me to take me up to town I was ready for anything. We went over in the little white launch to the landing-stage, and then up to Adelaide by train—the funny little train that part of the way puffs and snorts up the middle of the street, ringing a bell to make the cabs and carts and people get out of the road. Outside the station his motor was waiting—something went wrong with it at the last moment, so he could not bring it to Largs, but the chauffeur fixed it up and we went for a spin round the Terraces.

All the roads that flank the town are called terraces, North, South, East and West. I had often been there before, but it had never seemed lovelier than it did that day, with the fresh morning air blowing in through the Park Lands. We stopped at a shop for me to buy some hairpins, and at another for some music. Then we went on to a tea-shop, and after we had had tea we got back into the motor and whirled off to the Bay again just in time to catch the last launch back to the ship. The man was a dear, just like Roger's friend *would* be.

I haven't been ill since we left Adelaide. I don't think I could if I tried.

At the table next to mine sit a Sydney University Professor with a young wife and a daughter about twelve—there are three university babies as well, but they disappear at meal-times with the nurse to the music-room above—a Ceylon tea-planter returning after eight months in Australia, a Sydney girl on a visit to Colombo, and another bound for Cairo to stay with her brother, who is doctor to the Khedive; two very nice nurses, one the matron of a big hospital in New South Wales, and the other a sister who went through the war in South Africa and has travelled pretty well everywhere; a sallow American, and a cheery little Australian whose sister-in-law married a cricketer and afterwards became a countess.

Lower down is a table of uneaten missionaries and their wives. Both these tables are full of nice kind people who go through their three meals a day calmly, quietly and uneventfully.

But mine! It is absorbing, entrancing, epoch-making. There is never a dull moment or an expected one. As a Sunday school treat is to the Grand Prix, as a girls' breaking-up is to a Covent Garden ball, so is *any* table on *any* ship to this one of mine.

I sit at the head. On the right is a woman who is going to Manchester to join her sister in a milliner's shop. Next her is a Bradford man who has been for years up in the North of Queensland pearl fishing. He has also picked up some opals.

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On his feet he wears brown canvas shoes, on his back a khaki jacket, and on his hands samples of the pearls he has fished and the opals he has digged. In between the courses he and the milliner hold hands on the table. Opposite, the pearl fisher's brother, a middle-aged man with black hair and grey mutton-chop whiskers, sits juggling with a knife and a plateful of peas. By the time the cabinet pudding is dispatched the milliner's head is on the pearl fisher's shoulder. I look at the brother, he takes no notice, so I suppose the family approves of the alliance. Nobody else minds, and I'm sure I don't. But it's funny; cabinet pudding never made me feel like that.

Further along, Flora Mac Tavish and Donald Loch Lomond, the Scottish entertainers, converse together in a foreign tongue, occasionally translating that the conversation may become general. Then there's a fair, good-looking boy of about twenty-two, who wears well-cut tweeds, and russet boots with brass eyelet holes. He keeps himself rather aloof, talking only to a little dark sallow woman who came on with him at Adelaide. They were evidently friends before. What the relationship is I can't quite make out. She doesn't look like his mother, and she certainly isn't his wife. The last two to make up the company are a pantomime actress—whose legs after ten years have ceased to dazzle Australian audiences, and whose customs have successfully worn out the patience of Aus-

tralian managers—and a silent, dark-browed man who is going to England to study for the Presbyterian ministry, but in the meantime is spending half his time drinking with the actress, and the other half strapped down in his berth.

To-morrow we shall lose the Scottish entertainers, but the chief steward tells me that both the seats are booked. I wonder who the newcomers will be? It's very interesting having such quaint people at the table, but I would like just one person I could enjoy things with. The Professor predicts that when the icy reserve of the fair boy at the other end of the table is broken down, I shall at last have a congenial spirit. I am not sure of that, and feel more inclined to pin my faith to those who are about to arrive. The China people get on at Colombo.

Aunt Julie has written to some friends of hers there, and I expect they will meet me. I am tremendously excited. It will be the very first sight I have ever had of anything away from Australia.

## CHAPTER IV

OH, oh, oh, it was all so wonderful I don't know how to write of it! It just seemed like eyesful of lovely pictures, each one more beautiful than the other. It was like being in a theatre where all the scenery was real and the curtain never came down. From first to last it was a gorgeous blaze of rich colouring and luscious tropical scents, of cool white buildings with deep pillared verandahs, of red roads, shaded with great overhanging trees, and bordered with velvety emerald grass. Of bazaars full of ebony and brass and carved ivory and silver and rainbow embroideries, of baskets of laces and trays of precious stones. That the vendors were thieves and ruffians and the stones worthless didn't hurt a bit, unless you were out for commerce, and I wasn't. They might have been the dregs from a Cingalese Whitechapel who were urging you to buy the entrails of a common kaleidoscope under the impression that the bits of broken glass under offer were diamonds and rubies and sapphires and emeralds. I didn't care. Everything was so dazzling and bewildering that there was no time or

desire to do anything but bathe in the beauty of the moment.

I woke when the ship stopped. You always do. Outside the port-hole a tremendous racket was going on. It was the boys diving for money. The performance had commenced and I wasn't dressed. I pulled on my kimono, flew along to the bath-rooms, dipped, and ran back again. Then I flung into my clothes, and was on deck ten minutes after I opened my eyes. And what a sight! A long grey stone breakwater, with a round-topped tower at the end, ran out into the turquoise sea. Over in the distance Colombo, with its red-tiled houses and low-roofed landing-stages, lay half hidden in a wealth of deep green vegetation splashed here and there with the royal blue of the Jackarandah tree. Farther along towards the point, where the land lay flat and the houses had ceased, curved the red road that skirted the sea-shore, while silhouetted sharply against a cloudless sky a clump of coconut palms speared the horizon. I walked up to the other end of the ship. An Indian squatting on the deck was doing conjuring that would make even the most accomplished music-hall artist weep for his own incompetence. And doing it in the midst of a ring of inquisitive, sceptical people who almost stood on his tricks! Always he kept up a low caressing murmur of talk, and I wondered afterwards if he hypnotized us with it, for he fairly staggered even the most unbelieving.

At breakfast the steward brought me a letter. It was from Aunt Julie's friend, Mrs. Mainwaring, saying that she had to go out of Colombo that morning, but would call for me at the G.O.H. at five o'clock and take me home with her. Perhaps I could find some one to look round with till then.

Of course I was all right. I told the Professor's wife, and she said, "Come with us," so when we were hatted and veiled we got into a launch and went over. But before we left the ship I got a blow. I found out that the good-looking fair boy in the immaculate tweeds and brass-eyeletted boots was valet to the millionaire Egyptologist on the other side, and his companion was the Egyptologist's wife's maid. Heigho! Well, that throws me solely on to the chair vacated by the Scottish entertainers. So much for Dr. Heriot's perspicacity. I shall rely on my own bumps for the future.

As soon as we got off away from the landing-stage we were surrounded by a chattering crowd of men offering their rickshaws, but we waved them aside and walked across the road to the verandah of the G.O.H., or to be explicit, the Grand Oriental Hotel, which nobody ever calls it. The verandah runs round two sides of the hotel, and the front arm of it is lined with tables and easy chairs; the other, which faces another street, is more open, and is nothing but a succession of shops. It was very, very hot, so we sat quite still for a long while, drinking lime squashes and watching the people



that went backwards and forwards. There were tall, military-looking men in linen clothes with women in toupees, and they eyed us keenly, as we did them. There are ships in every day, but the residents are always on the look-out for familiar faces among the travellers, and the travellers, they are always on the look-out for everything. Up in the far corner of the verandah a merchant was busy showing a fascinating medley of embroidered kimonos, jackets, scarves, lengths of silk, umbrella handles and cigarette cases made of silver, and elephants carved in ivory and ebony, to a dazed but suspicious audience of untravelled Australians, who longed to buy but hated to be had. Round us surged incessantly men with trays of glassy-looking opals and pale sapphires, of moonstone jewellery, and tiny ivory and silver trinket elephants. Women who looked a hundred, but might only have been forty, with wrinkled breasts, toothless gums and rough white hair, hung lengths of lace in front of us, crooning incessantly, "You buy, laydee; verree cheap, verree nice for you, laydee; you buy."

When we had had enough, I told Mrs. Heriot I wanted to try and get some pin curls, so we left the doctor reading the paper and went off to hunt out a barber's. I had left home with a toupee to see me through the tropics, but somehow I never could get it to look as if it *belonged*. It was a wretch. One day after sitting enviously watching one of the Sydney girls as she sat hatless, with two

dear little curls kissing a brow on which there was not a shade of care, I said, "It beats me how you keep your own hair curled in this weather. I've got to choose between looking bald without a fringe, or immoral with a toupee."

Very deliberately she put up her hand, and extracting the infantile and innocent-looking curl, handed it to me on the end of a long wire.

"Two shillings each at Eugene's in George Street," she said, "and nothing but complete annihilation will ever prevent them curling."

I took it and examined it reverently. It was one of those little nothings that appear quite trivial, but in reality are tremendous factors in the weal or woe of an imaginative woman. Then I thanked her and handed it back. I would get some the moment I touched any land that sold hair.

We went round the angle and found a barber's under the verandah. I unwrapped my toupee and told him what I wanted. He produced another. I shook my head; then I divided the thing into three and showed it him. He took it with a look of enlightenment. "I know, laydee," he said. "I know, but not here. You come with me."

He led the way out into the street, and we followed. He walked very quickly, waving the toupee over his head. It was not easy to keep up with him, as he threaded his way through the traffic, but to encourage us he kept turning round and smiling, always waving that accursed front-piece.

After a while it seemed as if the traffic parted for us even as the Red Sea parted for the children of Israel. The sight of two flushed, shame-faced women chasing wildly down the principal street of an Oriental town after a fleet-footed Cingalee, who had apparently absconded with the hair of one of them, was enough to hold up anything. I longed to abandon the chase, but the thought of the Red Sea without anything more dependable than my own lank locks kept me running. And as I ran I argued. After all it couldn't go on for ever. Ceylon was only an island, and we would have to come to the sea sooner or later.

Suddenly the magnet drew up, and crossing the pavement opened a glass door, holding it for us to pass through. We entered, exhausted and unresisting. There was more hair here. My man and the shopman talked earnestly in their own tongue for a few moments, then the two of them came up.

"Laydee want some more 'air?" said the shopman winningly.

I nodded listlessly. I didn't care much whether I got it or not now. I didn't care anything as long as I could get home to the hotel by the back way. He led me to a case and opened it proudly. My own hair is what a tactless barber once called *cendré*, and translated as mouse-coloured. This case was full of tails, or rather switches. Black ones, grey ones, white ones, red ones, and—I am

quite ready to believe—blue ones and pink ones. I had no more use for a switch than I had for a torpedo. I put out my hand and pointed to the toupee.

"Give me that, if you please," I said mechanically. He handed it to me.

"And the paper." He passed it silently.

I wrapped it up and stuffed it into my blouse.

"Now," I said, pointing to a bottle of 4711 on the counter, "I will buy that rather than explain to you that I do not want switches of any kind, but most particularly do I not want those that match everybody's hair but mine. Ask me no questions, and give it to me as it is. I will take it without paper."

I gave him the money, he gave me the scent, and we went out into the street again. I would rather go the rest of the way without a hair on my head than make another such bid for beauty.

## CHAPTER V

AFTER lunch we got into rickshaws and went for a ride. As I had to be back at the hotel by five, there was no time to go to Mount Lavinia, so I missed that and Kandy. But some day, when I marry, I shall go there for my honeymoon.

We went along the red road that lies almost level with the sea, and skirts the brilliant turquoise ocean that washes up on to a beach of pale, yellowy-pink sand. Past the club-house to the Galle Face, and on through the native town, where little fat brown babies are tumbling in the dust, and steady-handed, tranquil barbers are shaving serene and untroubled customers on the threshold of the shop. Always the little brown children, scarcely more than babies themselves, with other babies astride a hip, run along beside the rickshaw with the unencumbered hand outstretched. And the scrap of a thing that straddles on the hip of the bigger baby, without knowing why, thrusts out *its* tiny fist, cooing in the same caressing voice that belongs to the ruffian of the bazaar, till you long to take it up in your arms and cover the round, wondering

face and dimpled, shining body with kisses, and kisses, and kisses.

On and on, past cool, shady bungalows, gleaming whitely from luxuriant gardens, past tawdry-looking temples and imposing public buildings. Sometimes we meet a carriage with a native grandee, sometimes a covered wagon drawn by two little drowsing bullocks, so small they seem as if they were only animated toys, and sometimes a smart dog-cart driven by an Englishwoman, with an unmistakably English man beside her.

Then all at once the air becomes heavy and sweet with spicy odours. The sweating coolies stop and carefully lower the rickshaw shafts to the ground. They walk away to the bushes, and plucking some branches bring them to us and thrust them into our hands, bruising the leaves as they offer them. We are in the cinnamon gardens. And as the thieving, lying rickshaw boy, with only a short life before him by reason of his profession, pushes his bruised flowers into my hands and says softly, "Laydee, you take," a sudden savage longing for love and beauty comes over me, a glimpse of power and freedom, a desire for completion. And it is all in the magic of that wonderful voice that is half-lover, half-slave, and wholly-entreating child.

We went back to the hotel. At the portico a victoria was drawn up with a native coachman on the box. He was dressed in white linen with a dark green turban, in the front of which glittered a

silver "M." These dignified, mystical men with their proud, patient humility, that is as far removed from servility as the stars are from the earth, make me—the child of a splendid and enlightened race that contemptuously calls all men less fair than themselves "niggers," and treats them as pariahs—feel very much like a worm. Think of the overwhelming insolence of it all! We—a latter-day people with a pretty taste for thieving—have successfully filched their garden from these children of the sun, moon, and stars, these children who have lived for ages in such undisturbed communion with nature and with beauty, that we can't even make them copy our vices to any appreciable extent. And having stolen their paradise, we have turned them into servants and behaved to them as if they were dogs. They must be treated like dogs because they will lie and thieve and shirk if they have the slightest chance. But why? Even if they stole before, who confirmed them in their belief that stealing was good? If a "nigger," because he happened to be strongest at that particular moment of the world's history, came into my house and said, "Here, out of this! The shed's your place for the future; take off my boots and be quick about it," I should lie and thieve and shirk, and feel perfectly justified in taking what belonged to me in that way, if I could get it in no other.

I know that while the earth lasts it has got to

be a question of grab amongst nations. If you don't take, the other man will, and even though you mightn't want, you must take, defensively, lest he shall by taking what you leave develop a maw that will swallow you up also. But in the name of all that's honest, let us call things by their proper names. Might is not right, and there's no virtue, only luck and muscle, in being top dog.

We make me tired.

Mrs. Mainwaring was waiting for me in the verandah, so I said good-bye to the Heriots, got my bag, and we went out to the victoria and drove home for tea.

It's funny with what different eyes people see things. I was in an ecstasy of delight every time we passed through a native quarter, but she wouldn't turn her head. She had lived with that around her all her life—at least all her married life. But when we came to an electric tram she enthused no end, and watched the car with the greatest interest till it turned the corner. I, who was brought up in a city where every street and every suburb swarmed with them, thought it an insult to the beauty of the place. She says that they are used exclusively by the natives, and that no English person is ever seen on one.

She has just the loveliest bungalow, set in the middle of a cocoanut plantation. It has been in the Mainwaring family for nearly a hundred years, and before that belonged to a rajah. It has two



wide verandahs, the outer one of cement, and the inner carpeted with cocoanut matting, and strewn with tables and cane easy-chairs. On to this one, the drawing-room, which runs the entire length of the verandah, opens from end to end, and out of that again the dining-room, which in turn opens into the compound at the back. Standing in the front verandah you can see the whole of the drawing-room, the whole of the dining-room, and the compound beyond. It's like being in a summer-house, except that it's cool and shady, and there's no dust.

We waited till Mr. Mainwaring and Francis—a nice boy of twenty—came in, and then we had tea, and talked till it was time to dress for dinner. After dinner we went into the billiard-room, and they insisted upon my playing with them, although I had never held a cue in my life. It was very sweet of them, because I must have been an awful duffer. Remembering which fingers went where, and how to crook the thumb, made me feel as if I were back in the clutches of the old French music-mistress again, and I kept listening for “C with the thumb, D with the first finger, E with the second, F with the thumb—Oh, mon Dieu, the *thumb!*”

I went to bed early because I felt tired, and I was to go out for a rickshaw ride with Francis next morning at seven o'clock. My bedroom was a great shadowy place, with white-washed walls about four feet up from the ground, and the rest

of the way green wooden shutters. The floor was covered all over with cane-matting, and in the middle of it there was a little iron bedstead shrouded with mosquito nets.

I did not dare put the candle out till I was sure there was nothing alive in the room but me, for Mrs. Mainwaring had said quite casually at dinner that they had seen a cobra in the compound two or three days before, but had not been able to catch it. I poked fearfully about in corners and under the bed, but there was nothing, so after barring the big double doors leading on to the verandah, I crept in under the nets and fell asleep to the sound of the wind sighing in the cocoanut palms.

## CHAPTER VI

NEXT morning I awoke long before it was time to get up, so I lay watching the light through the chinks in the shutters, and listening to the rustle of the trees outside.

After a while there was a soft pattering along the verandah and a knock upon the door. It was the ayah with tea. I got up to let her in and went back to bed again, lying lazily among the pillows while she untucked the mosquito nets and fussed about me with the tea tray.

I shall never do a single thing for myself in this world that I can get any one else to do for me! It is so lovely to watch people doing good, kind things. It makes you feel such an optimist. To think that there are still sweet, unselfish natures in the world, if you will only look for them. I am always looking for them, and I can't help feeling proud sometimes when I think that I am the cause of such beauties being brought to light. Sybil Marrable would never have got half the reputation she did if I had not let her come and mend my stockings regularly once a month. When I

get to London I shall write a book about a lazy person, and call it "The Gem Cutter."

I dressed slowly and went out on to the grass, where I found Francis jumping the fox terrier over his riding-whip. Two men stood by the porch, one with a rickshaw and the other holding a horse. I got into the dear little lacquered rickshaw, with its cool, clean linen cushions, Francis jumped on to his horse, and away we went down the long, red, shady drive, and out into the road.

Oh the joy of it, flying along in the fresh morning air, with the world looking as if it had just had its face washed, and the sun sparkling and glinting through the trees. The natives were already astir in the little village that lay outside the bungalow gates, and the children were laughing and tumbling in the road. Outside one of the huts a fat naked baby sat solemnly beating a shining Benares bowl with a stick, and another, quite a year old, more heavily clad in a silver bangle, was frightfully busy thinking it was sweeping a doorstep.

I longed to stop and gather up armfuls of these adorable things and stuff them into the back of the rickshaw and run off with them, but if I had the babies would have died of fright in three minutes, and horror would have frozen Francis stiff in his saddle. Perhaps it was as well to leave things as they were, but it was hard.

I snapshotted a group of coolies with their rickshaws drawn up by the road, and further along a

child with a coloured scarf knotted round her limbs came out of a thicket and stood, with quiet hands folded, and wondering, watching eyes, so I had to stop again and take her, and then we went on round by the racecourse and saw the horses galloping, and passed some smart, lovely women and some ugly men riding, and so—in the language of Pepys—to breakfast.

I dare say if I lived in the tropics I would get used to the kind of food they eat there, but the fruits—and every meal seems to be made up of half-a-dozen kinds, cooked and otherwise—always taste so sickly. I remember in Queensland trying to get excited over the mangoes and paw-paws and grandillas, but I always ended by taking refuge in pine-apples. All the others are so fleshy and pulpy and sweet.

After breakfast Mr. Mainwaring sent a native shinning up a tree to knock down a cocoanut that I might see how it was done. This particular tree was thirty feet high, and looked like a bare pole with a bunch of leaves and fruit at the top. It is done exactly on the principle of Willie's purple monkey that climbed the yellow stick, with the exception that Willie's monkey never got any for-rader, and the native was up and the cocoanut down before you could blink.

Before he began he carefully tied his legs together at the ankles; then clasping his hands round the trunk of the tree, he placed the soles of his feet

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firmly against it as close to his hands as he could, and in this way, opening out and shutting up, he reached the top.

When the cocoanut came down I stared. Instead of having red hair all over it, and a funny little place like a monkey's face where you bored holes to get the milk out, it was a shining yellow ball. They laughed; I suppose they knew what I expected, then they tapped it and handed me the milk to drink. There was a whole tumbler of it, and as I knew it was bad for indigestion, and I had it somewhat, I didn't put the glass down till I had finished the lot. It's the greatest mistake to forbid anybody anything morally or physically. It's like writing "please don't turn over" on an advertisement. You mightn't want to, you might feel that there would be nothing worth seeing when you did, but just because that was down in the corner you would have to, even if you knew that by doing it you entirely sacrificed your chances of success in this world and of happiness in the world to come. I am sorry to say it, but I think the Ten Commandments are responsible for a lot of wrongdoing.

When lunch was over Motu, in his green turban with its fascinating "M," brought the carriage to the door, and I went off with Mrs. Mainwaring shopping. We bought some singlets for Mr. Mainwaring and some socks for Francis—after that, I shall expect to be able to get chest protectors in

Paradise—and then drove on to Sir John and Lady Hawley's to call.

There was a carriage at the portico, and we had to pull up behind it and wait. A Cingalee lady stepped in and drove away. As she got in she caught sight of Mrs. Mainwaring and smiled. It was so funny to see her in the broad daylight in a low-necked dress, with flowers and jewels in her hair, and diamond studs in her nose.

The room was dark going in from the sunlight, and I trod on a cat. The cat yelled, an unseen parrot screeched, and I nearly went on my nose. In the middle of the tumult I heard myself being introduced as a visiting Australian. That would explain my peculiar entry, for I have heard that abroad we have the reputation of out-savaging the savage.

They were very nice about it, and didn't seem to mind me treading on the cat a bit, and when I had righted myself I sat up and drank my tea like a little lady, and gave some quite unreliable information about droughts and artesian bores and labour troubles and things.

From Lady Hawley's we went on to the Garden Club, where all that is beautiful and manly and blue-blooded in Colombo meets, when the sun goes down, to play tennis and drink tea, and say divers things to and of each other. It was getting dusk when we arrived, and the courts were empty but for some small native boys who were gathering up

the balls. The verandah and balcony of the clubhouse were full of girls in muslin frocks and shady hats, and men in flannels. Through the lighted windows you could see the waiters moving about with trays of glasses, and down on the grass more players were loitering together in groups talking. There was that lovely sense of brooding peace that comes with the dying away of day, with the stillness only broken by soft laughter and the tinkle of spoons and cups and saucers. If only things could always be beautiful and serene and gentle like that. I hate the thought of work.

Directly we got in some men came up to Mrs. Mainwaring, and she introduced them, and we all walked over the grass and sat down at a table, and we had more tea.

I suppose a new girl is always a curiosity. Anyway, they were very nice and attentive to me, and when I said good-bye one asked me if I would be at the club next day, and I said no, that the steamer sailed in the morning, and he said he was sorry, and I said very heartily so was I, and they put us into the carriage, and Mrs. Mainwaring said, "Home, Motu," and we drove away.

Next morning I had to be up early, as I wanted to buy one or two things on the way to the ship. With great difficulty I refrained from kissing Mr. Mainwaring and Francis and the ayah when I said good-bye.

We called in at a place in the town, and I bought



a tiny Ceylon silver tea-service on a silver tray, a silver pen to do my masterpieces with, and a little model of a bullock-cart, and another of a catamaran. Then we went down to the landing-stage, took our places in the launch, and went off to the ship.

When the last launch had left us, and I had waved Mrs. Mainwaring out of sight, I turned round and blew a kiss to the shore, and said—in my inside—"Good-bye, you dear, lovely, beautiful place. I will come back to you again some day." And so I shall, unless I stay an old maid without any means, or marry a bank clerk without any brains.

The seats vacated by the Scottish entertainers have been filled by a diver and a policeman.

## CHAPTER VII

OF course we did everything that everybody else has done on a mail steamer. We played bull board and quoits and deck billiards and cricket in the heat, and danced every other night from before Colombo till after Port Said. And the first-class gave a ball and issued invitations to the second, and we were snobs enough not to want to go, but the Captain came over and said, "Bluestocking, I wish it"—so I told it at the usual afternoon meeting in the Travelled Nurse's cabin, and they all said, "Elizabeth, which do you consider your best frock?" and I said the one with the lace frills, and they said, "Our representative frocks are all tucked away in the bottom of the hold, but we will go on condition you wear it with your very best manner, and walk first." And I said, "So be it," and made them choose a walk and style of conversation then and there. Most of the people we knew were very nice, but there were some who weren't, and others who had a hazy idea that the stern of the ship was reserved for ladies' maids and valets only, and were prepared to accord us a welcome in keeping with our station.

When the night arrived I did my *cendré* hair with extra care, and as I had put my own fringe into pins and covered it with the toupee, and worn a Panama hat over it all day, it was all right so long as I didn't get hot dancing. But there was no fear of that, for the afternoon council had decided for my languid style, which made it much easier for me and didn't run any risks with my flounces.

I put on my white silk stockings, and satin slippers with the scarlet heels, and my best lace petticoat, and the frock that was all frothy white frills up to the waist. Then, when I had pinned a wreath of leaves into my hair and thrown the pale blue crepe shawl, with its lovely silk fringe, over my shoulders, I trailed into the music-room, where the others were waiting.

I looked round.

"Where is the pearl fisher?" I asked.

"He is not coming."

"And his brother?"

"Neither."

"But the diver—and the policeman?"

"They do not waltz."

That only left the missionaries and the valet and the Presbyterian student and a few others who we knew wouldn't come. We had with us Doctor Heriot, the Countess's brother-in-law, the tea planter and the American.

"It is very annoying; we shall have to make

some sort of apology for our men being so neglectful. How do you think I look?" I swished my tail round and peacocked across the room.

When I turned back the Captain was standing at the doorway looking in. "Not bad for a blue-stocking," he said critically. "Stop putting on airs and come to the party; you're late already."

I walked first, according to contract, with the Captain. The whole of the side of the ship was deserted. I caught him by the hand and danced him up it. When we got near the top I slowed down.

"You've got one or two people at this end that want dropping over," I said. "For that reason we don't want to come to your party, and for that reason also I am going to put on side. Watch."

We had reached the improvized ball-room. I dropped my flounces as we turned the corner. The dancing had not begun. Slowly and quietly we walked the length of the room up to where most of the people were standing. As I walked the rustle of my skirt upon the floor made my heart go out to Maria, who had chosen the best glacé there was in the shop for its foundation.

One or two dowagers put up their long-handled glasses and stared slightly. I wasn't a professional beauty within miles, but neither was I a lady's maid. There was a nice woman, with a very sweet, jolly face, that I had been introduced to before we left Melbourne, and she got up and came towards us.

We stood talking for a few moments, and then the Captain went away to host.

"You look very nice," she said approvingly, as we sank into two vacant chairs near by, "but isn't that frock too frail for a ship dance?"

"I do not belong to myself this evening," I replied enigmatically. "I am Esther dressed for the vindication of her people."

One or two men that I knew came and asked for dances, and then several others were brought up to be introduced, and I smiled fleetingly, and graciously permitted them to write their names down for waltzes. I wouldn't dance any squares—I knew my fringe wouldn't run to both, and on the good behaviour of that rested the success of the evening—so I sat with Mrs. Fletcher quietly talking while the music struck up. And as it played the rhythm of it got into my feet and my brain and made the blood tear through my veins till I ached with the effort of keeping still, and I longed to run to the deserted side of the ship and pick up my skirts and whirl and whirl and whirl till I had danced the torment out of my body. And after everything was over we had a midnight conclave in the Travelled Nurse's room, and those whose representative frocks lay in the bottom of the hold said, "Elizabeth, we *were* proud of you, we *are* grateful to you, and we *will not* forget what you have done this night." And I smirked and looked down, and they said, "No more of that; take some

ginger-nuts and tell us what he said," and when I had worked them up to a frenzy of expectation I told them, and it was—

"You are a rippin' waltzer, don't you know. Mayn't I come over *every time* you have your dances? Thanks awfully, it's awfully kind of you. But you are really—oh yes, *really*."

So much for a silk-lined frock and a misrepresentation of my beautiful sister's smile.

And later on one of the dowagers said affably to Mrs. Fletcher—

"Your friend Miss Beresford is quite a noticeable-looking girl, and carries herself extremely well."

And another, who had been talking with Dr. Heriot and the Travelled Nurse, said—

"I had no ideah there would be such respectable people ovah thear. They are quite the sort one might meet in one's own friends' houses!"

Really!

## CHAPTER VIII

AT Aden we only stayed three hours, and we were not allowed to land, so we amused ourselves watching the people come on board from the little tender.

Oh, the town! What an abomination of desolation it looked! Just a dreary little cluster of houses lying at the foot of lifeless, slate-coloured rocks that towered above and around. There were a church and some barracks, and along the front by the sea a roadway, with a few dusty trees. Not a blade of grass to be seen anywhere.

They were all men who came on, with the exception of a pretty pale-faced bride with dark hair, who was honeymooning, and wasn't a bit interested in any one but her good-looking husband.

There was a keen, dark Scotch boy who had to do with jute in Calcutta, and was coming home for a four months' holiday, and another English one who had been sent home to have appendicitis; two officers who were returning from the Lhasa expedition, and several others who were more or less uninteresting. After they came we danced more than ever.

One day when I was lazing in my long chair watching some energetic people doing their daily two miles, I saw Mrs. Fletcher coming towards me with a stranger. He had come on at Aden, and hearing my name asked if I was related to John Beresford of Melbourne. He was quite excited when Mrs. Fletcher said I was, and asked to be taken over at once. He said Uncle John had once been very good to him when they were travelling together in some outlandish part. He had been very ill, and it seems Uncle John had nursed him. After that he came over every day. And when we got to Port Said in the early morning he got up and went across, and brought me back ever so many boxes of cigarettes and a heap of sweet stuffs they are noted for there, Turkish delight, and nougat, and such-like things.

I don't think anything has ever made me feel quite so odd and queer as the Canal. To go hour after hour slowly and quietly through the great silent desert, and to know that but for the narrow trough in which the vessel moves you are on dry land.

You look out over the waste to where the sand meets the sky, and strain your eyes for a sign of life. There is nothing. Everything lies wrapped in an unbroken silence.

Sometimes when I was a child I used to long to get out into a great empty paddock, so that I could yell at the top of my voice and feel that



no one heard and nothing mattered. As I watched, the same feeling came over me again—to jump out on to the bank and run into the middle of this quivering silence that beat about your ears and throbbed in your brain. To run and run until you had lost yourself, and then suddenly to stand still and listen to your own voice as you had never heard it before. To listen to it free of the fear of criticism, free of the irk of self-consciousness. It would be like a savage catching sight of himself in a mirror, or a blind man opening his eyes on the world for the first time.

As I stared and dreamed something moved on the sky-line. I suppose my eyes were getting used to the outlook, for I saw a dark speck coming swiftly out of the horizon. It was an Arab on camel-back, and I no longer had the desert to myself. I went to the other side of the ship, where boys were running along the edge of the bank catching the pennies thrown by the passengers.

We got to Port Said about five in the morning. It was quite dark and bitterly cold. I got up because I wanted to say good-bye to some of those who were getting off, and there was such a terrific noise going on, you couldn't have stayed in bed if you had wanted to.

It went on getting colder and colder all the way through the Mediterranean, and at Marseilles I thought I would die of it.

We arrived about twelve o'clock in the morning,

and till lunch time leaned over the side and watched the people on the quay. There were some women selling villainous-coloured shawls, a man with a performing dog, and two tattered children, in bilious green art muslin skirts and torn stockings, dancing to a barrel organ. They all looked very cold and mechanical, except the extremely dirty child, and she danced as if she had the devil in her.

The Heriots were not going up to town till late in the afternoon, so when The Man That Uncle John Nursed came over after lunch and asked me if he might take me, I said, "Yes, please, certainly."

I think the cabs they have away from home are much nicer than the ones in Australia, because ours, unless they are hansoms, are all wagonettes, and in those you can hardly see anything of what's going on. Everywhere else they have carriages, and you can see everything.

We drove round the town for a while; it seemed so noisy and confusing after the desert and the Mediterranean. Then we stopped at a lovely shop, all satin boxes and bows of ribbon, and had tea and little cakes you felt it was wicked to eat, they looked so beautiful; but after you had eaten them you knew it wasn't wicked, only foolish.

I bought a pair of French boots that were too small and a hat that didn't suit me, and after that we went to the Hotel de Louvre and sat in the entrance hall watching the different people drive up, and then we had dinner.

Nearly everybody left the ship at Marseilles because they were afraid of the Bay of Biscay, so from there on it was very dull. Two Rhodes scholars and a grammar school boy who had been spending their holidays in Spain, got on at Gibraltar, and when we couldn't bear the cold a minute longer, the four of us played tig round the ship, with the fire buckets for home. The pearl fisher had got so excited at the thought of seeing his wife and family again that he couldn't wait to go all the way round by sea, so *he* got off at Marseilles too, but the milliner came on because the man she was going to marry was coming down to the docks to meet her.

I suppose, as a matter of fact, you could no more judge of their real feelings by that six weeks' digression than you could tell the state of a man's soul by looking at his coat. They were only playing football in winter so that they might be in form for cricket in the summer.

But it was new to me.

## CHAPTER IX

IT does seem so funny to be in a perfectly strange place with altogether new people, and not a soul that belongs to your particular life up to now, within twelve thousand miles. It's like being born again when you're grown up; it's starting everything afresh. I think if any one had any very great trouble it would be the very best thing for them to do to lose it, because even if their hearts were aching, their eyes and their minds would *have* to be caught sometimes; they wouldn't be able to help themselves.

I am ready for everything, because I have no troubles at all except indigestion sometimes, and scarcity of funds always. Out in Australia lack of money doesn't hurt very much unless you want to be in the smart set—we've got one, too—and I never did. Here in London it's different. You seem to want ever so much more, and it isn't only that you *want* it, but you need it.

I'm staying for a while with Agnes Middleton, a cousin, and later on I am to go into Devonshire to stay with Aunt Julie's eldest brother.

Just at present I'm enjoying myself so much that I don't want to do anything but what I *am* doing, and when I think of work it puts me in a panic. Unless something happens to sober me and take me out of the pleasure vortex I am in, I shall do no more work again in this world.

Agnes and George Middleton never go anywhere. They sit at home together, and when they are not worshipping each other or sleeping by the fire, they are adoring Peter, an imp of seven, who happened six years after they were married, and is valued accordingly.

That is all very lovely if you are one of the trinity, but if you are only looking on you get a different sensation out of it altogether. So when The Man that Uncle John Nursed said to Agnes, "I hope you will allow me the pleasure of showing Miss Beresford some of the sights before I leave," she had a feeble struggle in her mind between British proprieties and relief at having the burden taken off her own shoulders. And relief got it. What really decided her was The Man asking her to come too. She was so terrified at the prospect of being unnecessarily widowed of George for any hour of the day or night, that she was willing to endanger the reputation of twenty me-s rather than bring about such a calamity.

I hadn't the least intention of missing anything I had the chance of seeing decently and in order, and to stop to consider what people who didn't even

know that I was alive, thought, was obviously absurd.

When she mentioned the conventions to me privately I said as much to her. I pointed out the fact that while I could go alone to Westminster Abbey without attracting any notice, I couldn't call in at the Empire under the same conditions so unobtrusively, and I hinted that perhaps the Abbey might at times fail to satisfy the claims of such catholic tastes as I believed I possessed.

As long as she was content that the moral uprightness of The Man That Uncle John Nursed was unquestionable, there wasn't the faintest reason why I should nightly sit and watch her and George slowly surrender to the influences of a good fire and a better dinner.

Of course, I didn't put the last bit to her in those words exactly, but whatever I said had the effect of making her see things in the proper light, for in one month I've nearly worn out my three evening frocks.

Oh, it is so nice and dependent having some one who knows the ropes to come and whisk you away to theatres, where you sit in a comfortable stall and see in the flesh people you have known by sight in the illustrated papers for years and years. Or to go off to dinner to some lovely place that is full of shaded lights and flowers, and dreamy music and beautiful women, and carefully-groomed men. Our men have good hearts, the dears, but they do hate

bothering about detail. As long as they shave every morning and can have as many baths a day as they want, there is no need to worry about anything else, the rest they leave in the hands of Providence and the tailor. And very often the one does them just as badly as the other.

We did see things! I didn't go to any of the instructive places like the Museum, or the National Gallery, or St. Paul's, or Westminster Abbey, because I could do those later by myself, but we lunched at Prince's, and had tea at the Carlton, and dined at the Savoy, and lots of times we went into the grill-room at the Trocadero and listened to music that made you feel nothing under heaven could hurt or vex you as long as it was playing. We went to all the theatres that were open, and to most of the music-halls, and I thought I had lost my heart once or twice till one night I saw some one I hadn't seen before—only heard of—and then I knew that I had never really lost it at all till that moment, and when it went it went so completely that I have never been able to look to any one with unprejudiced eyes since.

Why should one person, who is apparently made of the same mixture as a great many others, simply walk right in and take possession of your heart and brain and understanding with the first word she utters?

How is it that one, by saying words that have been said charmingly and sweetly scores of times

before, suddenly make you feel—in the middle of winter—that the sun is shining, the grass is growing, and the children are playing, and it is sweet to be alive, and you *are* going to conquer the whole world before you have grown much older?

How is it that one who has smiled across the footlights out into the audience generally, has managed to convey to you the knowledge that that smile was intended for you individually, that she knew you were there, and looked for you out of pure comradeship that you and she might enjoy the jest together, for if any one would see the point and appreciate it, that person would be you?

Why should she make the laughter come to your lips and the tears catch in your throat at the same time for no explainable reason at all, and why should you want to stretch out your hands with your heart big and tender and say, "You dear!" to a woman you had not even seen, five minutes before?

I don't know.

It was Ellen Terry.



## CHAPTER X

I EARNED my first right on this side of the water to the title of greenhorn the other day, because except for getting into 'buses that are going the wrong way I haven't done anything yet that any cockney might not do. I think at first the more sporting English people I met were rather disappointed. They had read books about Australia, and I was not acting up to form at all. I did not stroll down Piccadilly in a scarlet shirt cracking a stock whip and shouting "Cooee" light-heartedly and cheerily as I strolled, nor did I come to loggerheads with the police through attempting to boil my billy under the trees in Hyde Park.

But I did get taken in by a palmist. It was all so very youthful, and after it happened it seemed so simple that I wondered if I had made a mistake in thinking I should be—never mind—next birthday, or if life had in some ways passed me by.

A week or two after I arrived I was buying ties in Regent Street, when I heard a voice behind me say, "*Well*, Betty, this is nice," and turning round I saw Laura Morrison, a Melbourne girl who came home about six months before I did. I

nearly fell on her neck and kissed her. Here at last was some one to shop with that wasn't a man, and that—unless she had got it in the meantime—hadn't a husband waiting at home for her. I have taken The Man That Uncle John Nursed with me sometimes, and he has been quite nice and waited quite patiently, but the mental vision of him drumming his heels on the curb outside, or flattening his nose forlornly against a window full of mysteries, always made me take something I didn't want to put him out of his misery.

As for Agnes, she came with me once, but she kept her eye fastened so feverishly on the clocks, and we had to run so fast there and back that there was nothing in it. She can't shop in the morning because George comes home to lunch, and she can't shop in the afternoon because he comes home to tea, and she can't shop in the evening because he comes home to sleep, and if he didn't the shops are shut.

Therefore it was not to be wondered at that I nearly kissed Laura by the counter. We went in to Buszard's to lunch, and sat talking for a long time. When we turned out into the street again we stood for a while wondering what to do next. A procession of sandwich-men moved slowly along by the curb advertising a palmist. Under the name in big letters was written the seductive word, FREE.

Laura was watching interestedly. "That looks

fairly moderate," she said in a meditative way. "My pleasures have up to now cost me quite as much as they should. I would like to get something for nothing, particularly a palmist."

We watched the men till they had gone past, and then turned and walked slowly down Oxford Street, looking in all the shop windows as we went, and forgetting all about the palmist. Suddenly we pulled up before a dark green door with a small brass plate. It was the name on the sandwich-boards.

I looked at Laura, and Laura looked at me.

"Let's," I said, and she rang the bell.

We were shown up into the room where Madame received. Madame was in. Her hands were clean. I was glad of that, they so often are not. Which lady would be done first? I? Well, would I please come over here to this table, and the other lady retire behind the screen. And before I began would I just write my name in this book?

She produced a leather-covered book, with a lock and key, and opened it before me. I read—

"This is to state that I am consulting Madame — purely for my own amusement and not for any serious purpose whatever."

There didn't seem anything incriminating in that, so I signed.

Then she began. She gave a very accurate analysis of character, just as any one who studied

it and looked at your face might do. She offered me journeys and presents, and love troubles caused by jealous women, with ultimate victory to the virtuous (that was me). She told me water would never hurt me, but horses might, and draughts would be fatal.

Then she said, "Now I will give you a written delineation."

She tore a page out of an exercise book and proceeded to write. I could hear Laura behind the screen ripping her gloves off and jingling her bangles impatiently. When she had half-covered it she folded it in two and handed it to me. I read it and thanked her. Then I took out my purse. We have an excellent woman in Melbourne to whom we go when our love affairs and other speculations seem to be sticking. She charges half-a-crown, but advertises no free days at all. As I was a stranger and did not understand the subtleties of English methods I would give this one five shillings, that was allowing two and sixpence margin, so that there might be no possibility of words. I hate words.

I fumbled with the clasps of my purse. "What ——?" I began suggestively. I wanted to make it easy for her. It must be so hateful to have to ask for money even if you have a right to it, and I didn't quite see how she was going to persuade herself that she had to this. She understood my action and interpreted the shade of my voice.

I heard her say something, but it conveyed no meaning to me. I bent my head and listened again.

"One guinea, if you please," she repeated very distinctly; "my fee is one guinea."

There was a movement behind the screen. Laura was putting on her gloves again.

I called to her invitingly. "I have finished. You can come now." I wasn't going under alone if I could help it.

She put her head round the screen. Her voice was shaky, but joy sat in her eyes. With one foot over the edge she had stepped back from the precipice and was safe.

"No, I don't think so, thank you," she said. "You have been so long we will be late as it is. I shall have to come again another day."

I asked the woman to excuse me if I seemed over curious, but would she mind explaining the inner meaning of the sandwich-men? She said if I had noticed carefully I would have seen that the advertisement said, "Written Delineation Free." It was the magnificent gift of this sheet of exercise paper setting down that I was "of a frank, candid nature, not too orderly in my habits, generous in my instincts, and possessed of strong magnetic attraction for the opposite sex," that these weary gentlemen were engaged to advertise, and in such a fashion as would successfully rook the fresh and unsuspecting.

So I lied. With exactly two half-sovereigns

and two sixpences in my purse, I said it was impossible for me to give her a guinea as I had not the sum with me.

She said perhaps I would give her what I had and send the rest by post. I gave her half and said perhaps. Then we went down silently into the street. When we had shut the door behind us Laura looked at me solemnly and said, "Poor Betty, that *was* hard luck." I said, "Never mind that. Where are we going that we will be late for it?"

She shot me a glance out of the tail of her eye.

"Laura," I said, "you lied. You threw away your immortal soul to escape paying a miserable petty guinea to a poor palmist. You are not going anywhere."

"Perhaps I wasn't," she said; "but that is not lying, that is diplomacy."

I tried to frighten her.

"Give me five and threepence, the half of what I lost, and I promise not to mention this to your aunt."

"That won't matter," she answered cheerfully. "Aunt is a bit of a—diplomatist herself, and the artist in her always responds to the artist in others. Let's go and have tea."

I never got any more satisfaction out of it than that, except seeing more beautiful things marked ten and sixpence that afternoon than I had ever seen in my life before.

## CHAPTER XI

IF there's one thing more than another that would give me the most exquisite entertainment and the keenest, thrillingest joy, it would be for Aunt Julie to come home and stay for a week in the house of her step-brother, James Montgomery, with me there to watch.

"I've just come up after a fortnight's visit, and every time I think of Aunt Julie doing even a week-end of it I rock backwards and forwards in silent ecstasy.

Just before I left home she said casually that she had written to her step-brother, James, telling him I was coming to London. She said she hadn't seen him for about twenty years, as she married young and came out directly after, but when she left he was a big, powerful man, who was inclined to order his women-folk about, and divided his affections between horseflesh and chapel.

When I had been in London a little while I got a very sweet note from Mrs. Montgomery asking me to go down and stay, so as I thought I ought to do all my visiting before I started work, I accepted for as soon as she could have me.

They live at Plymouth, and there are four or five girls, pretty and fresh and charming, but they don't count. Nobody counts but Mr. James Montgomery. I arrived in time for tea. They sat all round the table for it, Mr. Montgomery at one end, splendid and stalwart, with the head of a patriarch and the manner of an oracle. Mrs. Montgomery at the other, small and quiet and subdued. Every time the anchovy paste got near Mr. Montgomery's end there was visible anxiety on the faces of all the other Montgomerys. I found out afterwards that he considers anchovy paste extravagance, and so to prevent argument the pot is concealed behind the tea-urn, and all plates supplied by Mrs. Montgomery. As I was new they couldn't very well do this with me, so they were forced to risk the displeasure of the oracle. They got more easy after it had been flirted about a few times under his nose without drawing any comment from him, and in a little while dropped the furtive knife action that had me notice first, and spread their bread in a reckless, not to say foolhardy manner.

After tea a Bible and hymn-books were produced.

Mr. Montgomery raked the assemblage with his eye.

"Where is Susan?" he asked. The ninety and nine did not satisfy him.

"Call Susan quickly," said Mrs. Montgomery to the youngest Montgomery, who nipped out of



her chair, opened the door and said "Thuthan" several times before she got a reply. The dining-room bell was broken.

Susan came, and looking round the room, made an agonized spurt for the chair nearest the door. She was a young girl with a homely face and a swivel eye, that rolled horribly when she was in the least bit disturbed. I could see that these family parties were a great strain upon her.

"We will sing 'A little ship was on the sea.' Susan, will you raise the hymn?" said Mr. Montgomery in fascinating tones.

This was meant to bridge the distance between the kitchen and the hall, and to show Susan that he at any rate regarded her as one of the family. Instead, it threw Susan into a condition bordering upon apoplexy. She rolled her eye, twisted her features, and plucked with frenzied hands at her apron, until I felt if some one didn't loosen her collar she would foam at the mouth.

"I think, my dear," said the quiet little voice behind the urn, "it would be as well to ask some one else," and Susan's convulsions were over.

He turned to me. He was evidently going to make us all feel at home. "Miss Beresford," he said tentatively, "would you care——?"

I saw myself looking like Susan.

"No, thank you," I said hurriedly. "I would rather some one who is used to it would do it."

With that he cast his eyes over the tea-urn.

"Mother," he commanded, and mother raised it.

It was then that I longed for Aunt Julie. To have had her sitting opposite, and to have watched her face as a hymn-book was thrust into her hands, and there came upon her the consciousness that she was about to sing "A little ship" with the Montgomery family and Susan over the forbidden anchovy paste. To have seen her dignified wonder as the unwilling Susan was dragged from her kitchen to the glare of the footlights, and to have watched her still further trying to conceal her emotions while Mrs. Montgomery—who had raised it so high that by the time the refrain came all the other Montgomerys had dropped out beaten—soared blissfully into altitudes where it became impossible for any but the youngest Montgomery to follow.

Oh, the joy of it!

Mr. Montgomery was fairly hung up. He started well with the others, and when he found things were likely to get beyond him he began confidently to search for the octave lower. He likes hearing himself sing, and "The little ship" is his particular favourite, so there was no expectation of his retiring before he had made a good fight for it. When at last he saw himself hopelessly outclassed he said, "We will only sing the hymn half through this evening," and turned the meeting into channels where he would have the monopoly.

We knelt down and he prayed. I don't know

how long it was, but the girls told me, after, that as he could generally be relied upon not to stop under half-an-hour, those who were clever enough to bag the seats by the door made a practice of slipping out and returning when they heard him tiring. He unconsciously helped matters by praying from the far end of the room with his back to the door, and to guard against accident it was the duty of one of the family to oil the lock and the hinges carefully every morning before he came down.

If it hadn't been that my knees went to sleep I would have enjoyed it tremendously, for I had never heard his sort of prayers before. They were not like people generally pray when they ask to be given strength to overcome evil and selfishness, and charity to make them thoughtful and decent to other people. They were long intimate talks with the Almighty, full of kind advice and suggestions as to the best way of running the Universe. It was practically the steward going to his master and saying, "Look here, it's not to be expected that you should be able to know all these little details that naturally come under my notice. I am on the spot and can't help seeing these things. Don't you think it would be an excellent thing if you did so and so?"

And he's frightfully in earnest over it.

## CHAPTER XII

THEY had the same service after breakfast every morning, and then he would go out for a tramp through the town. Before he dressed everything had to be thoroughly warmed, and as it was always done at the dining-room fire, no one got a look in till he had gone, for by the time his coat and overcoat had been spread over two chairs, and the fender had been decorated with his boots, gloves, muffler and hat, the family was pretty well sitting on the window ledges.

His love of horseflesh had evidently been more love of bargaining than anything else, because when he ceased driving and had no further use for Tattersall's he turned his attention to auction-rooms, and filled the house with his victories.

To-day, as the family had good cause to know, was the sale day, and if the date had not been burnt into their understanding by past experience, they would have known it by his air of silent concentration, and the purposeful set of his chin, as he took his stick from the rack and stalked down the garden path.

When he had gone the family drew their chairs

up to the fire and made a book upon the day. If it proved to be libraries or furniture, they would be no worse off than they were at present. They had ceased to resent capital—which ought to have given them some extra frills and furbelows—being locked up in musty volumes that were never even cut, so long as they were not called upon at a moment's notice to play autoharps or wear unknown people's clothes.

On two occasions when the hearts of the two eldest Montgomery girls had yearned in vain for some summer daintinesses that flourished in the High Street, he had returned triumphant from the field of battle with a van-load of china ornaments and a fur jacket cut from the fashions of twenty years before. Another time it was twelve pounds fifteen shillings' worth of tinned tongues, and again four violins that must be learnt by the four girls for the purpose of accompanying "The little ship" at the family prayer meetings.

To-day the betting was on books, but it was decided that for safety's sake the most unlucky Montgomery should put her money on personal adornment as a means of staving off the dreaded contingency.

He came in just before dinner—why do people who have servants dine in the middle of the day?—and we all sat down in a fever of suspense. All through dinner he was calm and suave, but there was an electric something about him that made you

feel great things were about to be revealed. At last human nature could stand it no longer.

"Where did you go to-day, dear?" said Mrs. Montgomery in a would-be unconscious voice. It was so tense that we all nearly shot out of our chairs.

He toyed with the onions on his plate. He lives on onions.

"Round by the Hoe and up the High Street," he said blandly.

"Did you meet any one?"

"Only Mr. Mac Ostrich, who said he noticed Margaret was absent from the Tuesday prayer meeting, and hoped she wasn't ill."

This was a facer for Margaret. The Oracle had a cold and couldn't go himself, so Margaret, who was going to a tennis party on the next day and wanted to look extra nice, wagged it, that she might wash her hair.

"Were you ill that evening, Margaret?" he inquired solicitously.

"No, father."

"May I ask why you were not at the prayer meeting?"

Margaret went straight for it. "Because I wanted to wash my hair," she said, staring stolidly out before her.

"Do you think it is more important that you should wash your hair than your soul?"

"Yes, this week I did."

We were terrified. No one knew what had come over Margaret.

"Why, may I ask again?"

"Because my soul had a bath last Tuesday and my hair hasn't been washed for a month."

There was a heavy silence. We sat looking at Margaret, waiting for fire to come down from heaven and burn her, or for the vengeance of the Oracle to break out and blast her.

We waited. I don't know whether it was minutes or centuries.

Then Mr. James Montgomery spoke.

"My dear," he said, looking at his wife, "if you have quite finished your dinner I would like you to read me the paper."

And nobody screamed.

After the paper had been read he leaned back in his chair and hooked his thumbs in his waistcoat. He was very satisfied with everything. The political results had proved that what he had said all along had been right. The Government, when it was not intriguing and corrupt, was crassly stupid and incompetent.

This testimony to his infallible judgment made him at peace with all men.

He would not keep the secret back any longer.

"I looked in at the Rooms this morning," he said affably, "and I picked up something that ought to give you all a very great deal of pleasure."

"Oh," said Mrs. Montgomery faintly, but trying her best to look happy. "What is it?"

"It is a piece of purple broadcloth," he replied. "A sample length of most extraordinary value that I was fortunate enough to get at a very low price. The man assured me it would never wear out. There are forty yards in the piece," he added, "so there will be a frock for each, and I particularly desire that you should have one, mother; it struck me as being peculiarly your style."

One by one the family escaped and found its way to the attic, where coffee was served. Mr. Montgomery did not approve of coffee or tea after lunch, so it had to be partaken in a room at the top of the house where he was least likely to go. I went up first with Margaret. I felt very sorry for them, but as each one came in and sat down, silently gazing at the other with stricken, anguished face, it got too much for me, and I lay back in my chair and cried and sobbed till I was exhausted. Think of it! The five Montgomerys, led by the mother, clothed from head to foot in purple broadcloth that would never wear out. If, as time wore on and the broadcloth refused to wear off, they were to attempt to escape from it, with the vigilant eye of the Oracle ceaselessly upon them, they wouldn't have a hope in the world. Even if they were to enter into negotiations with a buyer of cast-off clothes to relieve them of one they would have to



make sure that it was sent out of the country, or else they would always be meeting it.

Whichever way you looked at it there was no escape. They must appear collectively and individually in purple broadcloth till a capricious Providence should please to set them free. Oh, Aunt Julie, where did you get him!

## CHAPTER XIII

It was early April when I came back from Devonshire, and as the Middletons were about to leave Clements Inn for a place further out, I thought I would go into the country and try quietly by myself to get some work done.

But so far I've done very little. How could any one, with all this loveliness calling, sit indoors driving a wretched pencil over a more miserable scribble-block? If it were possible, it would be wrong, and in such surroundings it would give me no pleasure to do wrong. I felt I must just sit outside from morning till night and watch.

It would be criminal to be indoors when everything is happening outside. A few days ago the little apple tree in the corner of the grass plot was full of crimson-tipped promises, but beyond that you wouldn't notice it. To-day it is an extravagant mass of pink and white blossom. In the woods you can't walk for bluebells, while the hedges are thick with violets and daisies, and catseye and flowering nettle, and honesty and wild forget-me-not.

As for the cherry trees, each one is a snow-storm,

and the long spreading branches are drooping heavily with the weight of their lovely white burden.

If I do make an attempt at working the cuckoo begins calling from the field opposite the sitting-room window, and when that happens you know you've *got* to stop. What the barrel organ sets out to do in the London streets the cuckoo accomplishes in the country lanes. I will back a barrel organ and a cuckoo against any known or unknown obstruction this side of Heaven.

But, as Tony and the boys used to say at home, "What's the odds so long as you're happy?" and I am quite happy.

This village is barely twenty miles from London, yet for all that it knows of business and its responsibilities it might be a thousand miles from nowhere.

It is quite true that you don't come to the country for the sake of getting what you have abandoned in the town, but when it means that you are dependent upon the tradespeople "feeling like it" for the delivery of your butter and milk and eggs, it makes you much less contemptuous towards civilization and modernity than you feel when you are in the dust of it.

The postman, who gets twelve shillings a week and his boots, lets you have your letters if he happens to be passing your way. The cow-keeper, who lives next door, engages to supply you with milk twice in the day, but you may consider yourself

lucky if you get it once. When I grow brave I am going to ask him if he would mind letting me water it myself. As for a home-grown vegetable, there isn't one nearer than Covent Garden.

I went out the other day to search for food. Knowing that what looks like a private dwelling may very often be the village shop, I peered into every window carefully as I walked. After a while I saw two pieces of languid-looking beefsteak lying on some scales behind the geraniums on a windowsill. It didn't look frightfully seductive, but I thought perhaps there was more inside than met the eye through the geranium pots. I knocked. There was no answer, so I went to the next door and knocked there. This made the other door open. I went back and entered the shop. Beside the geraniums in the window and the steak on the scales, and the woman who opened the door, there was a printed government notice about weights and measures pinned on the wall, some chopped suet on the block, and a mutilated sirloin hanging from the ceiling. The hand of God had made the sirloin beautiful, but the hand of man had marred it so successfully that it took an expert to know it. My early training helped me. I told the woman politely what I wanted—steak, but not the kind that was lolling on the scales.

She looked as if she were sorry for my chances, and explained.

It was this way. The butcher having a bad

cold, and she herself not being very fond of touching meat, they had decided to close the shop.

I said what about the sirloin? And she said yes, they had already cut a steak off that; if it pleased me I could have another.

It pleased me. She unhooked it and called the butcher to come and cut it. He simply said, "Do it yourself," and took no more notice. Evidently in her mind this settled things. She apologized for me having to go without when I had been so near success, and hung the joint up again. This was more than I could bear. I had to get it somehow.

I said, "If you can't cut it I can; please bring it back," and she seemed quite interested. She took it off the hook again, and propping it up on the block, looked at it meditatively up and down and all around.

"How would you do it?" she asked thoughtfully, with her eyes still on the sirloin.

There was only one way *to* do it. I said, "This way," and sketched an imaginary line round where the knife ought to go. She was not at all inventive, but she was very imitative, and carried out the design with an intelligence that proved her to have, unknown to herself, the makings of a very fine butcher. All she wanted was some one to open up her possibilities. She tossed the bone into the waste-paper basket, weighed the meat and wrapped it up.

"When shall you be getting a fresh supply?" I asked as she handed it to me.

"I don't know," she said reflectively; "it all depends upon the butcher's cold."

That was a week ago. In the meantime I found another butcher. Yesterday I went past the shop of the old one. The steak had disappeared from the scales, and there were two new pieces of meat hanging over the geraniums. I am glad the butcher is better, but I shall stick to the one I've got. He doesn't seem so delicate.

## CHAPTER XIV

THIS household consists of the man and his wife, two sons, an Unauthorized Baby, and Mrs. and Master Hazel, an old couple who have a bedroom and sitting room even as I.

The man is a gardener, and works somewhere about three miles from home. His wife, a pale, tall woman, with quantities of black braided hair, spends her time keeping the house clean, making tarts for her family, looking after the Unauthorized Baby, which belongs to an absentee member, and forgetting to order my butter.

One boy, tall and slender, with a small, well bred head and a short upper lip, is stable-boy at a house near by, and the other, when he isn't at school, caddies for the golfers on the common. Mrs. Hazel, an alert, stout woman, with a lovely complexion and crisp white hair, looks after the church and goes out by the day to provide the sitting-room and bedroom for herself and Master, who sits patiently at home by the fire or hobbles out into the wood on his crutches and gathers firing for the general wants. He can't do much else, poor soul, because even if his rheumatics would

let him, his heart disease won't. But he is very cheerful, except when the minister comes to sympathize, and is proudly tender over his old gal, who in her turn speaks of "My Will" in a tone that would make you think if you hadn't seen him that she was married to some dashing spark half her age.

I think I would rather go out charing for something that could make me say "My Will" in that voice than I would have emeralds and motors and Venetian point and *not* be able—but I am willing to wait a little longer if there is any chance of my getting both.

We wash here on Tuesdays, and I sit indoors and shiver lest anything in the shape of a man should be overcome with a desire to see me on that day, for all the waking hours and nearly all the grass plot are given over to a reckless and shameless blazoning of the family secrets that whirl and twirl madly on the clothes-lines overhead. And they are frequently pink, which, added to the fact that the grass plot is only separated from the road by a low privet hedge, makes obliviousness impossible.

In the field at the back eight woolly sheep, five cows, two horses, and a squad of matronly fowls with their chickens live together peacefully and harmoniously. Although they are all so close together, each lot has its own particular *ménage*, and neither interferes with the other.



In that—always—it seems as if animals are so very far ahead of human beings. There are just as many different kinds of human beings in the world as there are animals, only human beings won't see the difference. If those animals were us, the hen would suffer a wild and tumultuous passion for the horse, and in time go mad or die of a broken heart because of the hopelessness of it all. Or the horse would lose its head over a silly, brainless young sheep, and go straight to the devil because she showed a preference for one of her own stupid kind. That's the sort of thing we do; but they know better, these creatures that we drive and eat and call contemptuous names.

Before I give up asking questions in this world, there is one thing I would like to know, and it is, where those sheep put all they eat?

They are eternally eating; they never stop. They avoid violating the hygienic principle of not eating between meals by making their meals so long that there simply *is* no time between them. Browse, browse, browse, crop, crop, crop, nibble, nibble, nibble, on they go ceaselessly and untiringly. And a sheep's interior can only be a certain proportionate size. It fairly corners me.

Yesterday, when I was out for my walk, a girl and a man rode past. I knew them at once. They came out of the Christmas number of *The Graphic*. She wore a long coat and a three-cornered hat, and he a bowler and leggings. They weren't as highly

coloured as they used to be in *The Graphic*, but even in my uncritical days I always thought *The Graphic* was inclined to overdo it a bit with regard to colour.

It is so strange, this coming to a land that you have only been able to guess about through the medium of illustrated papers and Christmas cards, and finding all these pictures come to life.

Our country is so different, so very different. In place of luxuriant woods and gently-rolling meadows we have great armies of silver gums that climb the mountains and march down into the gullies, waving their plumed heads and singing a song of eternal unrest. Here, everything is serene, calm, secure. There everything is gigantic. Danger, distance, droughts, deserts. One travels hundreds of miles to get away from civilization, and just as far to get back to it.

Here, even in the most secluded old-world spot, one is always within *cooee* of everything that ministers to his comfort with the saving grace that it never obtrudes itself unless it is wanted.

It is like living in the Garden of Eden, with the knowledge that you have only to press the button to be able to change your fig leaves for a dinner-coat, and your wild herbs for a seven-course inspiration at an adjacent Verrey's.

It is so tender, so restful. To walk for miles between hedges of holly and thorn and dog-rose, along country roads shady with great spreading

trees, past sleepy red cottages set in meadows jewelled with buttercups and daisies and drifts of hyacinth, down by little winding streams and still watercress beds.

Oh, I don't think any Englishman can ever get the thrills out of his country that we, who have been brought up with only a book knowledge of it, can.

He knows his meadows are beautiful, but he doesn't know how beautiful till he has tramped for miles over dusty plains with a pitiless blazing sun beating down on to his aching head. He knows that his little streams are cool and refreshing, but he doesn't know what life there is in them till he has ridden for days in the hope of finding water, and at last pulled up beside a river that is as dry as his own parched throat.

Those are the things that open your eyes to the wonder of this Garden. After I passed The People out of *The Graphic*, I called in at the Post Office, which wasn't a post office really, but a shady back verandah, with a glass window and a letter-box under it. I asked the man if the lane I was in led to anything that was particularly worth seeing. He said "Yes," and I said, "What, and how do you get to it?"

He said, "Keep right along till you come to a wood. Go through the wood, cross the fields, and you will come to the Baptist Chapel. It is quite

new, has only just been built, and I go there myself every Sunday."

I thanked him and started. It sounded a nice walk, even though I were not to get the same amount of pleasure from the outside of the chapel that he had evidently derived from the in.

I went slowly along the narrow lane and through the gap in the fence into the wood. There I stopped and looked round.

It seemed as if I had walked over the edge of the world and was standing in one of the cathedrals of heaven. In the middle was the nave, a wide open space, carpeted with soft brown moss. On either side stood the pillars, lofty oaks that ran up tall and straight, meeting high overhead, and spreading out branches that formed into a groined ceiling of exquisite lace-work. There was no sound in this wonderful house but the singing of the birds in the branches above, and no sun but that which came glinting in through the open-work of the lace.

I sat down at the foot of one of the pillars, and feasted and feasted. After a while I heard voices. Two men came along with their bicycles. One said, "Oh!" and stood quite still; the other said, "Beautiful sylvan scenery, this; make a lovely stage-setting for the Forest of Arden. Great place for having tea; eh, what?"

I went home by the fields and forgot the Baptist

Chapel, but all the way along I said the same prayer over and over again, and it was this—

“Oh Lord, blind the eyes of editors and publishers to the imperfections of my handiwork, that they may gratefully and unquestioningly accept whatever I shall please to send them, and thereby enable me to have a place in the country before I grow too worldly to enjoy it.”

I got back to the cottage as the evening was closing in. On the grass plot the Unauthorized Baby was fiercely pursuing the black rooster for the crust it had in its beak.

Master Hazel paused in his wood-chopping and looked up.

“You bin for your waark, Miss?” he said, propping himself on a stick.

I nodded.

“You look waarm,” he went on, as I leaned against the porch and fanned myself with my hat.

“I am warm,” I replied. “I’ve been walking for nearly two hours.”

“Ah, yes, it do make ’ee sweat,” he said reflectively. Then he went on chopping.

Perhaps he was right; but it wouldn’t have occurred to me to put it in that way. They are a bit like the Old Testament, these children of Nature.

## CHAPTER XV

At last I've got a flat, and it *is* such a darling! It has a hall about the size of the palm of your hand, and a doll's bath-room, and a bedroom with a mantelpiece three inches wide, and a grate that will hold six lumps of coal, provided they aren't bigger than pigeons' eggs, and quite a big sitting-room, and a kitchen that's all clean yellow paint and cupboards.

It had only been built a little while when I took it, so I was able to choose the decorations myself, and I had just the most intoxicating week doing it that I've had since I bought my clothes to come home.

The Man That Uncle John Nursed was very interested in the putting of it together, and offered—bless him—to come and help me every day until it was done. I thanked him very seriously, and said it was very good of him, but I didn't want a soul to see it till the last picture was hung. I would sooner look after two teething infants, in addition to the house-moving, than I would have *half* a man wandering about trying to help me to do things. They are such babies in some ways—men, that's

why they are so irresistible. Give a child a piece of dough when you are baking, and it will massage it until it is quite unfit even to look at, and be perfectly satisfied that it has made a cake. Give a man a hammer and a mouthful of tacks, and he will make a few holes in the wall and persuade himself that he has built the house. There's no mistake about it, they are just the most necessary things in existence—if you want entertaining.

I did every scrap of it myself. I made the curtains, and sized and stained the floors, and laid the linoleum in the kitchen and the matting in the bedroom, and then I started cheerily to do the carpet in the sitting-room. It was a woven one, of the kind called Roman, and the biggest made. It looked a bit too heavy to get into position with my bare hands, so I went over to the shop at the corner and borrowed a carpet-stretcher.

When the young man handed it to me I asked him how to use it, and he seemed surprised. I said I had never used one before.

He looked at me, then he looked at my hands, then he told me.

"You are not going to do it yourself?" he asked.

I said I was.

He didn't speak again, but he handed me the stretcher with such a maddening smile on his face that I swore to myself to lay the carpet alone and unaided if it took me half my life and all my strength to do it. I went back to the flat with my

head up, swinging the stretcher and setting my lips together.

That an undeveloped youth with a receding chin should have the right to smile at me like that, just because he was a man and I a woman, filled me with a rage that made me supernaturally strong. I marched up the staircase, opened the door, and going towards the sitting-room, slipped, wrenched my ankle and fainted.

It wasn't nice, but it would have been much worse if the draper's assistant had seen it. So I contented myself, when I came to, with dragging the carpet out flat, and turned my attention for the rest of the day to things that needed more artistic perception than brute force.

Next day I set my teeth and went for it. For five hours I pulled and I pushed and I stroked twelve yards of Roman obstinacy, till I was so stiff and sore that I longed to lie down and go to sleep for ever. But at the end of the five hours you could have played billiards on the carpet. When the last tack had been driven, and I was sitting exhausted on the edge of a packing-case, there was a ring at the bell. It was the assistant. He touched his hat.

"I came to m-make sure of the m-measurements for the couch in the alcove," he stammered. "Did you say five feet ten?"

I looked at him straight in the eyes. He blushed



furiously, fumbled with his pencil, and looked away.

He had not come to reassure himself about the measurements, and he knew it. Also when I looked at him, he knew I knew he knew it. He had come to see the carpet, and he wasn't going to if I had any authority in my own house.

I said, "I am sorry you should have been put to such inconvenience, as you were quite right, the measurement *is* five feet ten," and then I wished him good-afternoon pleasantly and closed the door.

But never again will I lay a carpet of any sort whatever. Matting is easy, linoleum is exhausting, but a Roman carpet—well, there is no word I've ever heard that gets within streets of what a Roman carpet is when it has to be laid. If fifty shop assistants with receding chins were to smile a hundred more maddening smiles at me for *not* borrowing a carpet-stretcher, I wouldn't care a button as long as there was no law in existence that could force me to do it. I have laid my only carpet.

Now that it is all over, past discomforts don't count for anything with the joy there is in having a place I can call my own. When I think of the horror of living in the economical London boarding-house, I feel as if I had got a palace. It is so dear and sweet and fresh, with its blue walls and white enamelled wood, and it gives you such a lovely restful feeling to have a bath-room of your

own, and to know that there is no one but yourself to sigh when you forget to put your things away.

It has taken me a fortnight to do it, but at last everything is finished, even to the putting away of the stores in the cupboard.

I have taken my meals at an upturned packing-case by the light of a solitary candle stuck in an unsteady lemonade bottle. I have eaten hard-boiled eggs without salt and sardines without vinegar, but the period of my probation is over, and now I shall go to bed for a week to try and get rid of the feeling that some one with a grudge against me has been over me with a garden roller. Then when I get up I will give a party, thank all my friends for their kindness, and settle down to work.

## CHAPTER XVI

I ONCE said that unless something happened to snatch me out of the vortex I was in I would never do any work again. It has happened, and the result is I have written five things in as many weeks, and three of them have been accepted.

I had my party and everybody came, including The Man That Uncle John Nursed. And they all said, "My *dear*, did you *really* do all this yourself? You *are* a wonder!" and I smiled that deprecating smile you have to smile when people praise you, even though all the time you may be thinking that they are not saying half enough. The Man left early as he had an appointment in the city before dinner. When he said good-bye he asked me if he might call and take me out to dinner the next evening, and I thought for a moment, to make sure I wasn't going anywhere else, and said, "Yes, I should love it," and he went away. It had happened lots of times before when I was staying with Agnes, and I thought no more about it. In the morning a messenger came with some roses, and I kissed the lovely things and dawdled about, putting them in vases and turning

the china about in the room till just before lunch, when I dressed and went into the club. I stayed there till late, and had to hurry home to change for dinner. I had only just finished powdering my nose when he arrived. I took him into the sitting-room and showed him the roses. Then I made a curtsey and said, "Thank you, kind gentleman. I will tell Uncle John, and he will nurse you again the next time you are ill in his vicinity."

He scarcely looked at the flowers. He just stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece and his head half turned away. I didn't notice at first how silent he was because I was busy hunting for some white cotton to sew a button on my glove with.

After a while he said, "I went out to see Mrs. Middleton this afternoon."

It wasn't an exciting enough piece of news to make me look up, so I just went on sewing and said "Oh!" to encourage him.

"I told her that I was coming to see you this evening."

"She knew; I told her myself yesterday before she left."

Then something sad in his voice struck me and I looked up suddenly.

He was playing with a china thing from off the mantelpiece, and his hands seemed to be trembling. He put it down and came towards me.

"I told her why I was coming to see you to-

night," he said. "I told her I was coming to ask you to marry me. Could you care for me enough, Betty?"

Oh, I did wish he hadn't. It does hurt to say no when you see any one wanting a thing very badly. I don't think it is ever quite as hard for a man to be denied his desire as it is for a woman, because even if he hasn't wounded vanity to help him he has his work, which he himself admits counts for a lot; but at the moment it perhaps hurts him more because he has been brought up since the days of Adam to expect to have his own way, and that has been the same as getting it. With him collectively, to wish is to be able, and to teach him in his old age—I mean his age since the world began—that he cannot always conquer, is to give him the same pain as you would give a man if you took him at forty and tried to make a tight-rope dancer of him. You will wrench his muscles, even though you don't break his heart. And it is a thing quite apart from wounded vanity, it is what man as an individual suffers through man as a kind, and has nothing whatever to do with him personally.

I longed to say yes for two reasons. I hated his hands to tremble so, and I do so dread the thought of being alone. I don't want to work and think and play for myself and by myself. It makes me tired and frightened. I want to sit beside the driver, not hold the reins. I want some one to take the responsibility, some one to make the money

while I wear the frocks, some one to see that I don't miss my train or lose things, some one to order me about, some one that wants me like George wants Agnes, and some one that can make me look at him like Agnes looks at George.

And here the thing that I most wanted was being offered to me, and for some reason I couldn't give, and so it was no use.

For the minute I felt bitter and cold and hard, and very lonely. Then I saw The Man's face, and it made me sorry.

"It's no use," I said. "I like you awfully, but it's not that way, and somehow I don't feel as if it ever would be that way." Then a sort of helpless anger seized hold of me, and I beat my hands together.

"Oh, I wish I could, I wish I could," I burst out desperately.

His face was white, but he smiled.

"Poor child," he said. "You can't make yourself just because I want you to. Let us try and forget about it. Where would you like to go for dinner?"

We went to the Trocadero because I thought it would be gayest, and it was simply a hateful dinner. Some one jumped our table, and we had to wait ever-so long for another. And the orchestra played all the things I love to hear when I am particularly pleased with myself and can enjoy thinking myself unhappy, but not when I really am. By

the time they came to Schubert's "Adieu" I was nearly weeping, and not the sort of weeping that it is a pleasure to do either, but the sort that makes your eyes glassy and your nose feel the biggest thing in the room. Fortunately I only felt like it, I didn't actually do it, but I was glad when the evening was over and I was home again by myself.

A few days after he came to say good-bye. He and another man were going abroad together, and they might not be back for some time. He was very dear and kind, and asked me if there was anything he could do for me before he went, but he didn't refer to what happened the other evening, and I was very grateful. All the same I knew he was thinking about it, because there was a look in his eyes that wasn't there before, and it hurt.

This will never do. If I am, through no fault of my own, going to break hearts, I must make my own hard accordingly, or else I shall never know any more peace.

A doctor can't weep over every man that he kills; if he did he would be drowned in his own tears long before he had a chance of proving how clever he was. But the first few must disturb his sleep for a while, or else he is a monster and has no right to be a doctor.

So I am working hard for two reasons. One is that the principal avenue of my amusements is temporarily closed, and the other is that I am not a monster, and need distraction from my thoughts.

## CHAPTER XVII

YESTERDAY I spent one hour of a golden afternoon in Hyde Park with the oldest man I have ever met. I was very young because I had a new frock on, and the Park was young for the same reason; but when at the end of the hour I got up from the little green iron chair, I felt that if I had not been determinedly savage and savagely determined, all the air and the sunshine and the trees and the new green grass and the crocuses and the daffodils and the hyacinths would have gone for nothing, and I would have left the place feeling as tired and as old as this man was so earnestly endeavouring to be.

If he were not so keen on being thought decadent, he would be very nice, this old man of twenty-three and a half. He is quite intelligent, knows his classics, and is on the most intimate terms with five different languages. And because he is a gentleman of parts it always seems so paltry that he should bother about play-acting. I try to insult him into being healthy and natural. Sometimes he is angry, but although his face cannot quite hide it his voice always does, and his bitterest revenge has been to call me primeval, and his saddest reproach



to say with a patient sigh, "You are very cruel, Princess," and to follow it up next day with a bunch of early roses or a box of violets.

Now if you are a person of any vanity—and I am full of it, not self-appreciation, but need of the appreciation of others—however angry you may get or however bored you may be by the affectation and posings of your intimates, you can't be angry for ever with a person who calls you Princess, supplies you with violets and roses in a world where such joys are representative of so much gold, and whose appearance will always be a credit to any frock in your wardrobe. But when you are feeling like a westerly breeze, and that person is behaving like a hothouse, something has got to be said, or else he is not doing his duty by his effiteness, nor you by your primevalness.

He called upon me at the Club when I was having tea with Cynthia. Cynthia is a young person with a figure like a serpent on end, and a complete understanding of the manner that should go with muslin frocks, shady hats, the artful simplicity of hair parted in the middle, and a turned-up nose. Cynthia and the Oldest Man were both working the same mine, only they didn't think so. The only difference was that their methods were not the same. I introduced them and rang for more tea. Cynthia bowed primly, and turned away as if she were not aware any more of the Oldest Man's presence. The Oldest Man bowed, and went on looking

half bored and wholly in pain. Nature chanced to make him in appearance like the High Priest of his Order, and he has done his best to live up to her suggestion. He parts his plain black hair in the middle, sweeps all expression from his face except extreme weariness, and winces when you mention healthy things like cricket or roast beef. That is quite right for the High Priest, because he is a survival of the time when the poppy and the lily had not begun to wilt in the mediæval hand, and also because he has purchased his privilege to do many absurd things by having said several wise ones; but for any one now to take it up and expect people to be caught by it is as foolish as it would be for a woman to rig herself out in prunella boots, a pork-pie hat, and a crinoline, and imagine she can fool the world of fashion into believing it to be the creation of her own brain. It is worse, because that fashion has really been dead quite a respectable time, while decadence is not yet cold, and though there may be some dignity and a good deal of interest in digging up a mummy of long standing, there is nothing but rank indecency in dragging a living corpse from its dying bed for the purpose of exhibiting its last muscular contortions.

Cynthia talked to me as if the man's chair were empty.

"I have been in the country," she said, drawing the curtains modestly down over her eyes, "and I feel *so* much better. At home they noticed how

worldly I had become in town, and it quite grieved papa, but now I am going to be *quite* different. I feel as if I shall *never* care about worldly things any more." She sighed softly, assumed a look of renunciation, and helped herself to the last piece of marzipan cake.

"If you were a genuine artist at your profession," I said rather bitterly, "you would have instinctively taken bread-and-butter. Sometimes you lose the sense of the fitness of things." I had been nursing that piece of cake for myself, and the result was disappointing.

"How funny you are," said Cynthia wonderingly. "I never understand half of what you say."

Then she held the bread-and-butter plate towards the man, and bent her eyes upon the tablecloth. "Won't you have some bread-and-butter?"

He looked upset.

"Oh no, thank you!" he said faintly. "I *nevah* eat bread-and-buttah." Then he shuddered and said "bread-and-buttah" in an undertone as if even the abstract idea were an agony.

I was not feeling able to stand much of that sort of thing that day, and the first signs of it made me restive. I made an attempt to stamp it out before it could get a proper hold.

"We'll have some more cake then," I said heartily, with a hand upon the bell.

The suggestion of bread-and-butter made him

look ill, but at the word cake he appeared to be seized with an attack of ague.

"Cake! Dear lady, no, *please* no!" he entreated.

"I'm sorry, but there's nothing else but muffins, and you will have to wait for those."

Cynthia lifted her innocent eyes and fixed them upon the horror-stricken decadent.

"What can you eat?" she asked considerately. "You can't have chops at this time of day. Do try the bread-and-butter, it's awfully satisfying."

It almost seemed as if the grey of his waistcoat turned a shade more ashen out of sympathy for its tortured wearer.

That a very young man of fashion whose life was spent in persuading those around that to him flesh was a weariness, nature a crime, and crime a joy, should be pressed with bread-and-butter, coaxed with cake and muffins, and sympathized with because chops were not forthcoming at five in the afternoon, was enough to make his heart stop beating for ever.

He swayed slightly, and leaned back in his chair and made a church with his hands. Cynthia watched him interestedly.

"Fancy you knowing that too," she said. "I never thought of men being able to do those simple sort of things. Did you learn it when you were a boy."

"I am afraid I don't quite understand," he said.  
"Have I done anything?"

"Yes, this," she said, illustrating rapidly with her hands.

"Here's the church  
And here's the steeple,  
This is the pulpit  
And these are the people."

I learnt that years ago—when I was *quite* young," she added pensively.

"Are you so very old now?" asked the Oldest Man, much in the tone that a grandsire would use to the babe he dandled on his knee.

Cynthia's eyes grew large and round.

"Oh yes, I am very old now—very old. I was twenty last Monday. How old are you?"

Now if the Oldest Man had been forty instead of twenty-three and a half, he mightn't have minded telling his age, but I knew he would lie very hard before he would allow Cynthia to know the truth. Therefore to put an end to a conversation that was neither instructive nor entertaining, and to stay his headlong course to the burning lake, I told it for him. I never saw a man look at me with such unaffected dislike in his eyes before. For once I had cheated him into a purely natural emotion.

I pulled on my gloves, well pleased. "Let us go into the Park for a while," I suggested.

"I can't," said Cynthia. "I am expecting Aunt Mary."

The Oldest Man went to get his hat, and Cynthia and I walked towards the hall. The porter stepped before us.

"Mr. George Belsize to see you, madam," he said to Cynthia.

I must say she had the decency to blush. I looked at her, and then she laughed.

"I can't see," I said, "why you should bother to call him Aunt Mary to me."

"It wasn't to you," she said, "it was to the funny tired man with you. Besides, I am expecting her. She thoroughly disapproves of George, and I have never yet had him to tea here that she hasn't been entertaining at the next table. It can only be chance, but it's a very unhappy chance. Good-bye. I hope you enjoy yourselves."

We went through the doors and down the steps into Piccadilly. By the curb stood a carriage. Out of the carriage stepped a lady. The lady was Aunt Mary. Poor Cynthia and George!

## CHAPTER XVIII

WE walked to the Park in silence. I felt I was in disgrace, and did not like to advance anything in the way of conversation for fear of being snubbed.

When we got to the Achilles we sat down. For a while I was very busy watching the carriages and the people. It is a sight you would never get anywhere at home, and to me it is always tremendously interesting. Dukes, duchesses, dandies, beauties, *ingénues*, actresses, young men with old wives, old men with young ones, lovely women with hard eyes and tired mouths. Tall, undeveloped girls with flower-like faces, impudent-eyed *demi-mondaines* with aggressively French toilettes and poodles that make you feel ashamed. In one hour you can see enough loveliness and ugliness and richness and joyousness and wickedness to give you meditation for the rest of your life. But the most fascinating of all to me are the tall young men with sloping shoulders and tiny waists, who wear yellow house-maid's gloves, claw-hammer coats and high hats many sizes too large for them. They look so mild and so gentle that you can't help feeling kindly

towards them at first sight. But although I always want to, I never look at them if I think they are looking, because it seems to frighten them. It's funny; they must dress to be looked at, yet they seem terrified if they catch your eye. I would like to hear one talking or see him at breakfast, because I can't imagine what they would say or what they would look like out of their uniform. I shouldn't wonder if they never are out of it. I can picture them laying their top hats and their gentle expressions together upon downy pillows last thing at night, and rising next day without either having been disturbed a hair's-breadth.

A carriage passed, a high-slung landau drawn by a magnificent pair of bays. On the box were two statuesque servants in powdered wigs, men as splendid in their way as the horses. Inside sat a sweet, fragile girl of about eighteen, dressed in black, with a hat of sweeping feathers accentuating the obviously genuine gold of her golden hair. Beside her, almost lost in the cushions, was a man with an expression in his face that made you feel you wanted to look away quickly. It was the notorious Everett Manners and his wife. He was fifty, vicious and a cripple. The marriage had made a stir because of his wealth and reputation, and her beauty and youngness. I looked at the girl; she had been married a year and wasn't yet nineteen. I shivered.

The Oldest Man spoke.



"Not cold are you, surely?" he asked quite kindly.

"No, I was only thinking," I said, following the carriage with my eyes.

He looked.

"Was it that?"

"Yes."

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"You are too primitive in your emotions, Princess. You allow yourself to be stirred by such trifles. Besides, you do him an injustice. He is really a most charming person. He is a cripple, and I adore cripples. He is also a specialist in every vice that exists, and as the earnest exponent of crime and the emperor of criminals he certainly deserves the respect of his fellow creatures." He flicked a lady-bird languidly off the leg of his trousers, and folded his hands over the top of his stick. "You have a lot to learn yet, Princess."

I wanted to get a few in before I finally lost my temper, so I made a great effort and held on with all my might, but it was very hard.

"I often wonder," I said gently, "why you who really are quite intelligent, should waste your time serving up a wearisome *rechauffé* of that kind. It's a long time since that *pose* has ever even got a clap, and here you are bringing it out in its dotage as a new turn. It certainly is an error that does no credit to either your taste or your judgment."

He showed some consistency and understanding

of his part by refusing to be roused, but he said something that made me wonder if such products were occasionally genuine. In this one the mixture of Grecian and Italian in his English blood may have had something to do with it.

"I am afraid," he said sorrowfully, "there is not much chance of educating you. You are so terribly handicapped by your birth. You are the beginning of a new race on a virgin soil, and your blood is so appallingly red and so appallingly riotous that it will take tens of centuries to subdue and civilize it. With me it is different. I am the perfected result of æons of investigation, and uncountable generations have been ground in the mill of experiment to evolve me. Thanks to the unflagging efforts of my ancestors, who in their diligent search after pleasure discovered many joys not to be found in the Manual of Orthodox Amusements, I was born so that nothing can surprise me. And it is such a merciful provision—such a merciful provision," he said, closing his eyes and leaning back, "because at the same time, I was born so tired that to have been subjected to the smallest shock would have completely shattered my already very nervous system and bereft me of my reason."

"I wonder you should mind that. You seem to get such pleasure from moral and physical wrecks that it is rather absurd to shy at mental ones. Is consistency ruled out of the gospel of Effeteness?"

"You don't quite consider the sequence," he ex-

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plained tolerantly. "I adore lunatics just as much as I worship cripples and criminals, but I should not care to be one because that would make me unable to experience any of the pleasures provided by the study of that interesting trinity. If I were to lose my sanity I should not be able to judge between virtue and vice, and think of the horror of it if I were by some mischance to fix my affections upon virtue." He shuddered.

We had left the chairs and were walking slowly down the Row towards Knightsbridge. I thought for a while, and then I spoke.

"What you say seems to affect me seriously," I said. "Perhaps if I tell you how you will be able to put my position in a better light."

"Anything I can do I will," he replied pleasantly.

"Well, up to now I have always thought myself fairly virtuous. Neither would I have classed myself as a cripple or a lunatic. But, although I could never dream it possible for you to be in love with me, I have not noticed, except on occasions when I have made more than ordinarily healthy remarks, that you have suffered much annoyance or discomfort through being with me. Unless you look upon me as a brand to be plucked from the burning, and are willing to put up with present pain for the sake of my future regeneration, there is nothing for it but that I am one of your unhappy trio. If I may choose please let me be the lunatic.

At least there is no responsibility attached to the position."

"Princess," he said, "you are under no heading, and belong to no classification; you are simply the Princess."

"With every expectation of becoming a lunatic under your guidance," I said ungratefully. We were in a deserted part of the walk. I stopped.

"I am going to say my prayers," I said.

He looked anxious. Then I said—

"Oh, Lord, while I live let me live. Let my brain be clear and my legs straight. Let the red blood rush through my veins from morning till night and from night till morning, even though by so rushing it causes me to break all the commandments in the Decalogue. And when it begins to show signs of turning to water or ink or absinthe let me die quickly and completely. Amen. Now put me into a 'bus."

I think I shall go back into the country to get disinfected.

## CHAPTER XIX

I'VE had an unusually bumpy heart lately, and after bearing it till I couldn't walk up the club steps without taking half-an-hour's rest afterwards I went to see a doctor. He asked me one or two questions, and said "Humph," and sat down to write. He was a specialist, a great big thing, with a stern face and a manner that wouldn't make you take an imaginary toothache to him twice. When he had finished writing he said, "Stop work for three or four months; live out in the open air. Take this three times a day, and come to see me next week."

I went away blankly to think things out. When I got home, I took out a pencil and paper and went through my accounts. During the eight months I had been in London I had written twelve things, sold seven, and been very badly paid for two. Also, I had exceeded my income by thirty pounds. My clothes were nearly all worn out, and now I had started a doctor. The *magnum opus* was only in its earliest infancy, and if written as it ought to be would not bring me in any return for a year—if ever. The winter was coming on,

and I wanted furs very, very badly. I tried to think out a scheme of retrenchment, but where to begin I couldn't quite see. It was no use knocking off hansoms, because I hardly ever took them. To depart from bacon and eggs for breakfast would be to violate a sacred British rite and strike a blow at the root of English Conservatism. I couldn't dismiss the charwoman, because her ministrations kept me from ruining my hands, and my money kept her from going into the workhouse. Twice we had been estranged; the second time it nearly ended in a complete separation, but she apologized so humbly and followed it up by cooking a bird for me so dazzlingly, that I overlooked her almost unforgivable insolence and opened my heart to her afresh. If she would only be as insulting to me again I could do it and let my hands take their chance, but lately she has been almost oppressively affectionate.

I must dine at home more often. It is very nice going into the club and dawdling through dinner with people who seem pleased to see you and are interesting to talk to, instead of sitting down to a lonely table with a book propped up in front of you, swallowing your food in square inches; but it certainly adds up at the end of the week. I wish poverty made me feel grand and strong and noble. I wish I could feel that riding in stuffy 'buses, between factory girls and sandwich-men, brought out my fine qualities and made me capable of doing

great things. But it doesn't. It only makes me rather sick and very bad-tempered. My soul expands in a new frock and shrivels in a shabby hat. It thinks no evil, and is kind in a lace petticoat and silk stockings, and it becomes petty and trivial when its boots begin to turn on it. I was formed by Nature to eat my dinner in Mayfair by the light of a hundred wax candles set in sconces of silver and fine glass, and Fate has decreed that I shall live in an uncomely street off the King's Road and depend upon a shilling-in-the-slot gas-meter and an unstable Welsbach burner for illumination. But at least the jade cannot prevent me having my moments.

I put away the balance-sheet I had been preparing, pinned on my hat, and went to the telephone.

The Travelled Nurse was in London. I rang her up and invited her to dinner at the club. She said, "Yes, thank you." Then I rang up the Oldest Man. He was dining a foreign correspondent at his club, but would be very pleased to bring him on after for coffee. On my way back I called in at the porter's room and told him to get me a hansom for half-past seven. Then I went up-stairs and put out my clothes, choosing them with deliberation. After this evening I could have a perfect orgy of entrenchment, but this evening was my own, and I was going to spend it making a long nose at Fate.

It is a beautiful provision in life that one joy

will sweep away a dozen sorrows. As I stepped into my coach *vien chaussé* and *bien gantée*—the last pair of each—I had as completely forgotten my frequent rides between the factory girls and the sandwich-men as if they had never occurred.



## CHAPTER XX

It's funny how things dovetail. Under the conditions that existed at the time I made out my balance-sheet and found it so seriously wanting, I hadn't the heart to float the scheme of retrenchment by setting the charwoman adrift. Yesterday she made it not only possible but necessary, and this morning, with my head wrapped in a towel and my hands swathed in the gloves of a housemaid, I swept and dusted my house from the balcony to the larder.

I know it doesn't seem a great feat to put a small flat in order before noon, write for several hours after noon, and put on a party frock and go out to a dinner or a reception at night; but there's a lot more in it than meets the eye at a first glance. To be a general servant in the morning, an artist in the afternoon, and a social success in the evening, you must either be born a mental lightning change artist, or built on the mechanical lines of a musical-box that can alter its tune by the mere pressure of a button and the insertion of another disc.

You've got to have three separate identities, and be clever enough and well regulated enough to be

able to shut off one and take on the other at a moment's notice.

I can't do that. I've got to specialize. I am what is called in politics a whole-hogger. If I am a servant I must be all a servant; if an artist all an artist; if a butterfly nothing but a butterfly. Taking temperament into consideration, it doesn't look as if this combination would be altogether a success, but at present righteous indignation against the charwoman has set up such an irritation within me, that I have completely merged the artist and the butterfly in the domestic, and can imagine no greater pleasure than sitting down dusty and panting to gloat over the brass I have cleaned, the furniture I have polished, and the pattern I have coaxed to the surface of the hearthrug.

I don't want to be unjust to her. She had a great many virtues that were quite wonderful. She was as honest as daylight, not a bit mercenary, and cooked like an archangel.

Her defects were that she couldn't light a fire without bribing it with a full box of matches and an absurdly disproportionate allowance of kindlers, and she had no more idea of getting dust from a carpet than I have of getting satisfaction from an editor.

She was so interesting and entertaining that I was quite willing to, and *did*, pass over those drawbacks for the sake of the pleasure of her company and her cooking; but when she took to submerging

me in condensed Billingsgate on the slightest provocation, I began to see that either she or I must go, and although I dreaded horribly the idea of a contest with her, I knew it would take one to prove that the retiring member would have to be herself.

The first storm arose over the sitting-room carpet. She thought sweeping it once a week was quite sufficient, and told me so. I thought sweeping it once a day scarcely sufficed to keep it looking as it should, and told *her* so.

She returned—in a high-pitched voice that poured through the open windows into the street below—that the life was being slaved out of her, and whisked madly and unscientifically at the offending carpet with an ineffectual broom.

I gave her to understand as calmly as was possible, with my heart bumping and my tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth, that if she was unable to do the small amount of work required of her, namely, sweeping one carpet, one passage seven yards long by thirty inches wide, keeping one kitchen in order, and cooking one egg and one rasher of bacon, one small teapot of tea and two pieces of toast, without risk to her constitution, it would be better for her to give up the struggle at once, and let a more able-bodied member of the profession take it up. Then amid a storm of recrimination I withdrew to my chamber, closed the door, and collapsed upon the bed.

As I lay I thought over my happy past, and

shrank before the prospect of a bereaved future. Instead of opening the door every morning to a cheery "Good-mornin'-miss-I've-got-a-lovely-bit-of-fish-for-ye," and going back lazily to bed while the fish was being converted into a poem, I would lie listening for a step that never came, and a knock that never would be knocked. I would wake alone, get up alone, and, if I had the heart for it, breakfast alone. My egg would be unsalted by the savour of her anecdote, and my tea unsweetened by the sugar of her approval. Every morning I would hear from windows opening into the area the cheerful sound of other charwomen in other flats singing over the crockery they smashed, and know that I, through my own idiocy and pride, had deliberately cut myself off from these joys. I should hear no more diverting tales of the doings of her landlady when the final half-crown had been spiritualized, and royalty, with a faithful and authentic account of its habits when relieved of the irk of public scrutiny, would be a closed book to me. Most of all I should miss 57. 57 is the top floor of the next block. 57 lives in affluence without money simply by locking the front door and retiring to the coal-bunk whenever the tradespeople become too obstreperous. It also sweeps without a broom.

This way. 57 is two girls training for the ballet. These girls engaged my lady. After she had picked up the pieces for a few days she asked for a broom that she might sweep. They said it

was quite unnecessary. They practised dancing five hours every day, and that removed all the dust worth mentioning, and let it settle on the furniture. All she had to do was to go on picking up the pieces and dust the furniture.

All these pleasures I was going to forfeit because I wanted the carpet swept seven times a week instead of once. But also, she had spoken to me in language that no lady ought to use to another. If only she had given me a chance to pretend I had not heard it! As it was, her voice might have been heard quite easily in any house with the windows open, at St. John's Wood.

When, later in the morning, she came to me contrite and with a broken spirit, and apologized for her injustice and intemperate language, I nearly fell on her neck and wept for joy.

Nearly, but not quite.

## CHAPTER XXI

AFTER that I had two months of uninterrupted happiness, during which time she got drunk twice.

I must honestly say it was not because of the amount she drank, but because of the way she drank it, and the unfurnished condition of her interior when she did it.

She was not like the average charwoman who leaves the larder looking like a locust-swept field. I hardly ever saw her eat anything, and I am sure she had no money to indulge in feasts at home. Therefore, when I foolishly gave her two fingers of whisky one morning because she looked pinched and cold, and she drank it neat, and came in five minutes after to tell me that she had a chest like driven snow, legs of alabarster, and a political grievance against Mr. Balfour, I had only myself to blame.

The first two didn't interest me very much, but the last sounded as if it contained possibilities.

I dismissed her snow-white chest and alabaster legs without comment, and got to Mr. Balfour.

"What has he done to make you angry?" I asked interestedly.

She couldn't find words to tell me. Whether there really weren't any, or she had lost them in the unwatered two-finger nip, I don't know even now.

"Oh, if I could only spell, if I could only spell," she sobbed, rocking herself backwards and forwards in an agony of regret.

"What would you do?" I asked again; she was rather tantalizing. Her beginnings were so tremendously realistic that they made you feel you were just about to have great things revealed unto you. Then she hung you up and left you.

She stopped rocking, and looked devilish.

"I'd tell him what I thought of him."

"I can spell rather well, and I would help you with any word you weren't quite sure of," I said suggestively. "What would you tell him?"

She stopped and looked at me fixedly.

"Would you write it for me?"

"Yes."

"And put in every word I told you?"

"Yes."

"And sign it with your own name?"

I didn't say no because I didn't want to stop her, so I ignored it, and only said again—

"What would you tell him?"

She came up closer as if to whisper in my ear.

"I would tell him," she lowered her voice tragically, "I would tell him——" Then she threw back her head, covered her eyes with her hands,

and dry sobs shook her as she wailed again and again, "If only I could spell, if *only* I could spell!"

I was so aggravated that I nearly shook her. Just then the kettle boiled over in the kitchen, and I sent her to see to it. She went away, and for ten minutes everything was so quiet that at last I wondered what had happened, and went to find out. She was sitting fast asleep in a chair by the kitchen window, with a happy smile on her face, and a silver spoon and a glass-cloth in her hand. She slept for half-an-hour, and then came to me perfectly fresh and clear, but with a look of complete amazement in her eyes.

"I'm blest if I didn't go to sleep when I was drying up," she said. "I found myself sitting by the winder with these in me 'and. Wot d'yer think of it?"

I knew what I thought of it, but I hadn't either the heart or the courage to tell her.

So to make up for the time that she was—asleep, she stayed and cooked a lovely little lunch for me, and while the fillet was grilling she told me that her grandfather was a very rich man, her husband a very bad one, that she herself was an excellent cribbage player, and her niece was a board school teacher who had only failed in her first examination through not being able to spell "promiscuously," but it was not to be wondered at, as it was when the word first came out.

The second and last time she was under the in-



fluence the Royal Family came under the ban of her displeasure. She, when engagements were not too pressing, often spent her mornings walking in the Park. One morning as she was waiting to cross the road the Queen drove by and completely ignored her. From that time on she had deliberately cut every member of the family, and if ever she saw a royal carriage approaching she turned right round and stood with her back to it till it had passed. Neither had she ever accepted another invitation to Buckingham Palace. Neither would she. It was all quite final.

We went on uneventfully, with the exception of one break, till the final came yesterday. She came in the morning as usual, and as usual went out to get something for breakfast. The shops are close beside the flat, and ten minutes does it all. This morning she was away half-an-hour. When my breakfast came in I poured out the tea. It came out of the spout white water and black sticks.

I said, "The water surely was not boiling."

She said quite bravely, looking at the sticks, "Oh yes, indeed it was."

I tasted it. It was icy cold.

I said, "You are mistaken; please make me some more." And she went away to do it.

I read the paper and dawdled through my breakfast, but nothing came. Then I went out to see. There are two kettles in the kitchen, one a two-gallon one, the other a half-pint. She had put on

the two-gallon one full. I would still be waiting for it unless I had spoken. With a marvellous restraint, considering I had waited an hour longer than usual for breakfast, and had so far only got half of it, I told her to fill the little kettle and let me have my tea the minute it boiled.

Then the fires of her anger broke out and blazed. What did I mean by going into her kitchen and interfering with her arrangements? *She* would not be treated like that by any one. *She* would not stand that anywhere. She was independent, she was, and had told an admiral in Park Lane to make his own tea, and a duchess in Rutland Gate to cook her own mutton, and she would do it again.

I got very hot and frightened inside, and very cold and still outside.

I said, "Unless you make that tea you shall never come back here again."

She said, "Not me, make your own tea!" and I made it, standing mute and rigid and sick with helpless rage over the stove, while she basted me in the boiling oil of her invective.

With a truly enraged charwoman no ordinary person has the faintest chance. You must simply let her go on till she is exhausted. One of her own kind might stem the torrent, but then it would only be because she had an equally powerful vocabulary, and the fittest would survive.

I took my tea to the sitting-room and shut myself in.

Every now and then gusts of the storm would blow up the passage, and beat against the closed door.

Then she came. I paid her without a word, and she went out, slamming the front door after her. In a quarter of an hour there was a knock. I went to see. Through the keyhole came a voice clear and sweet like silver bells and honey and pearls and running water. It was the charwoman back again.

I threw the door open wide, walked back to my chair and took up the paper again.

She stood silent for a moment. Then she said artlessly—

"Yer know that place I told yer about yesterday? Well, I went to it just now, and I don't think I'd like it."

I sat like a statue, and she went on as if I had answered.

"No, I had the sort of feeling they wouldn't pay."

She waited again, but I did not move.

"So I shall be here as usual to-morrow morning."

Her voice was young and innocent as a tender child's. Even in my fury I had to yield that she was magnificent.

"No, you will not be here to-morrow morning," I said lifelessly.

Still she tried to seduce me with her innocent gentleness.

"Why not?" she asked coaxingly. "Is it because I said anything I shouldn't 'ave? I know I *do* say things sometimes, but I don't really mean' em, an' I'm *very* sorry afterwards. Yer *will* take me back?"

"I will not."

She couldn't understand it. I had not answered her back. I had let her go on saying whatever she wanted to. I had been quite meek under chastisement. Why should I be less so now, when she was being kind and nice to me?

"Oh yes, you must, ye've done it before and yer'll do it again. I was very wrong, and ye've always been good to me. Ye'd better let me come back, do."

I got up and looked at her squarely. The blood was burning in my eyes, and there were red specks dancing before them, but I managed to keep my voice steady.

"How dare you speak to me as you have spoken to-day, and then come and behave as if nothing had happened! Do you imagine that because I forgave you, and forgave you again, that I am going to spend my life doing it? Do you think that saying you are sorry buys you the right to rage and storm and curse whenever things cease to go the way you want them to?"

"I'm very sorry——" she began.

"You have said that before, and I'm quite sure you are ready to keep on saying it, but it is too late now. Will you please go; you are wasting my time."

She looked at me in amazement.

"Do you mean it?" she asked wonderingly.

"Yes, I mean it."

She walked slowly to the door and closed it quietly behind her. Just before she closed it I heard her say in a tone of conviction—

"You're very foolish, *very* foolish."

She was quite right. I went to bed, and stayed there for the rest of the day with an overpowering headache.

## CHAPTER XXII

"It would be interesting to hear what you think of us," said the Youngest Man, as he rose to take the tea I had poured out for him. Then he sat down again, arranged himself comfortably in the arm-chair and prepared to listen.

Now if there is one thing in this world that makes me really happy it is to be invited to give my views upon anything.

With regard to this particular subject, I don't know that I had even catalogued them before, but it was a chance not to be missed.

I had some, and I would discover what they were as I went along.

"Do you mean what I think of you as a class or as an individual?" I asked importantly and to gain time. I always adore the Youngest Man, but he sent the thermometer of my affection up to boiling point by giving me this opportunity. He is a dear thing, with close-cropped hair growing grey on the temples, still calm eyes, a mouth the beauty of which he is wise not to obscure under a moustache, and the heart of a school-boy. As against

the Oldest Man's twenty-three and a half he is forty-four.

"I would like everything," he said, "provided it doesn't bore you to talk about us."

Bore me to talk about *anything*! I propped my chin upon my hand and thought.

"I'll begin by giving you the reason for things," I said, "the reason why you *are* what you are."

"We are——?" said the Youngest Man helpfully.

"The most tremendous success in a Scheme that is crammed with successes. The most compelling force in an irresistible Universe. The most idolized deity in an idolatrous world."

The Youngest Man looked really interested. I don't wonder. I was listening to myself, and I was getting frightfully interested too.

"And the reason——?"

"Is because you are simply savages with one idea, and that idea is to get what you want with as little trouble as possible."

"I don't quite see the logic of it," he objected.

"It is quite simple. To be a success you must specialize."

"Yes."

"To specialize you must concentrate."

"Yes."

"To concentrate is to fix your mind on one great end and work for it."

"Yes."

"To achieve anything big you must do that."

"Well?"

"Your specialty is getting your own way. You follow those rules and you get it. You don't waste time and energy by sitting down to wonder if it is right that you should have it, or if you will hurt any one else by getting it, or if you will find you don't want it when you have got it. You simply stretch out your hand and take, and if there happens to be anything between you and what you want you either push it aside or walk over it. But you get it. When it is yours, the fact that you wanted it makes it right that you should have it. If you have hurt any one in getting it you are sorry, but it had to be. If you don't want it you throw it away. Then you begin all over again."

"Are we as bad as that?" asked the Youngest Man wonderingly, helping himself to another slice of bread-and-butter.

"That is not bad; it is only purely, savagely, primitively natural. It is not bad for a baby to weep or a lion to roar and plunder when it is hungry. It is only following its own natural instincts. And as far as those are concerned, you are all babies and lions—you never grow up or become civilized—that is how you succeed. And we who want, and haven't the courage to take, recognize in you the other half of ourselves, and adore you for doing what we long to but daren't, for getting what we want but can't."



The Youngest Man narrowed his eyes and looked at me with amusement.

"Where did you learn all this?" he asked.

"I am an artist in my profession," I said, "and as an artist the secret of my greatness lies in the accurate study of human nature." As a matter of fact I was making it up as I went along, and was inwardly rather proud of the way it was turning out.

"Well," he said, "I am willing to admit that some of what you say is true, but it is a mistake to think that we have a monopoly. If you will cast your mind over the history of the world you will find that there have been a few feminine successes made on the same principle—or want of it. They stand out with a certain amount of clearness," he said reflectively, "and you can't easily find a masculine parallel for them."

"You notice them for just the same reason that you notice the milestones on a road, and take no heed of the grass that grows beneath your feet. As milestones are to blades of grass on a country road, so are women who have succeeded in getting their share of the world's apple to men who have got twice it. That may not be literature, but it is the truth."

"But why don't you get it if you want it?"

"Because thousands of years ago some power—man, I think (for his own pleasure again)—put our understanding into cramping-irons and said, 'It

is not wise, and it may not be convenient, that woman should know more.' Then he put her in a little ante-room with food to eat and clothes to keep her warm, and went off into the Great Hall to study life. Before he went he kissed her and said, 'Good-bye, dear. I shall be back early; enjoy yourself,' and when he had gone she drew a comfortable chair up to the fire and thought she was doing it because her clothes were pretty and her book was interesting, and he would probably come back with a bauble in his pocket for her. It was all right so long as he did come back, but when it happened that he forgot to kiss her before he went and only returned on rare occasions—generally without the bauble—it set her thinking. And the first thing she did was to wonder what went on on the other side of The Door through which the man went so often.

"She talked it over with the other women, and most of them agreed that while they didn't mind waiting if there was something to wait for, they weren't very keen on it if there wasn't.

"One or two of the more courageous ones tried the handle of The Door, and finding it unlocked, opened it the tiniest scrap and took a microscopic look in. The men saw them. Some said it was only natural they should want to, and only fair they should do it. Others laughed and watched for The Door to open again, thinking it might be rather good fun to invite the baggages in and show

them round. And others—the ones with the biggest holdings on both sides—scurried about like crabs in a panic and raised a great scare about the sacred purity of woman being at stake. Then they ran into the ante-room waving a lot of little white flags and shouting, 'The-hand-that-rocks-the-cradle-rules-the-world!' And the women who had cradles to rock said, 'These are indeed masters of our bodies and lords of our souls,' and they buckled on the cramping-irons two holes tighter. And the women who had not been invited to rock the cradle sat down to consider the wrongs of the unemployed, and the ones who had been invited to rock it without a license wept at the injustice of things. One or two had the common-sense to say, 'If it's so bad on the other side of The Door, why do you spend so much of your time there?' But the men only frowned and said to their households, 'My dear, I don't want to be uncharitable, but be careful of that woman, I don't care for her ideas,' and the woman with ideas—unless she was the sort that couldn't help asking questions—found that as she had to spend most of her time in the ante-room, it would be more comfortable if she appeared to think exactly as some of the others did, which was not at all. That was how we first became hypocrites, and lost the chance of ever being anything of a power in the world."

I stopped and was silent.

"What is it?" said the Youngest Man, looking at me keenly.

A ghost of a shiver went through me.

"I began it as a joke," I said, "and then I found it was real. I don't like it."

"Child," he said, "you are pushing The Door open too far for your own comfort. Go and play to me while I read your last chapters."

He is a wise person, the Youngest Man. In ten minutes I had cake-walked myself into a state of healthy mental unconsciousness again.

## CHAPTER XXIII

THOSE who pride themselves on knowing me from Dan to Beersheba—which means those whose joy it is to watch for and keep in remembrance the many backslidings of a hopelessly weak and self-indulgent nature, bless them!—would, with the blatant satisfaction of an amateur tipster who has spotted the winner again, record this as another proof of their infallible discernment.

But it is not so. I have not succumbed. I have triumphed.

I have fought steadily for three long months a battle against Prudence, Thrift, Caution, and all similar virtues that imperil the happiness of the true child of nature.

I have fought and prevailed, and I am not miserable as the moralists would have, but joyously, whole-heartedly glad.

For the baby elephant is sitting in the other chair by the hearth, and I am no longer alone.

It is bad, very bad, to live by oneself, but how to do otherwise on an income that wouldn't keep a self-respecting doll in pocket-handkerchiefs isn't found out all in a minute. Popular opinion would

be dead against a male boarder, and to have a female one always grabbing the best chair and telling her friends what sort of make-up I used was out of the question.

It is true that the poorest may own a dog or a cat provided he does not expect it to be accompanied with a written document alleging its descent from William the Conqueror. But the landlord made me swear, with my thumb on the agreement, that I would introduce neither into the flats, and I was too innocent when I signed to know that such a bond might be entered into with the dog actually sticking out of your pocket. So I pined and pined for something I could, when I felt like it, put my arms round and talk to without either compromising myself or defying the management.

But nothing happened, and I went on alone until I began to talk to myself.

Then I met the baby elephant, and the thought of one day possessing it was like the promise of rain after a long drought to a dispirited cattle rancher.

I first saw it in the toy department of a shop in High Street, Kensington. It was about the size of a month-old baby. Fat, poddy and adorable, it sat in an arm-chair at a doll's tea-party with its legs and arms waving hilariously. The attitude was one of infantile glee. There was something prophetic in the way it stretched towards me.

I picked it up, I wanted to know what it felt

like. It was exquisitely nursable. I trembled with desire.

"How much is it?" I asked.

The High Priestess with the fuzzy fringe and the supercilious expression swung her eye on to me indifferently.

"Eight-and-nine," she said at last, merely because she couldn't get out of it.

Could I—might I—would it be wrong? I wanted it so, I was so very lonely. Then my obligations rose up and clamoured. The piano wanted tuning, the incandescent globes were cracked, the washing bill was not—— No, it couldn't be.

I put it back in the chair and walked away. Going up the staircase I saw three more all boisterously happy, riding on the backs of big honey bears and whacking at their heads. I hurried on. I was not strong enough to stay. Life is full of pain.

After that, without admitting even to myself any reason for the change, I did all my shopping in High Street, Kensington. In one particular shop I haunted the part where they sold china. To get to the china you had to go through the toys. Always the same joyous baby elephant sat at the same doll's tea-party.

One day he was not there.

I felt my heart stop. I tried to speak to the girl as if I was not minding.

She was an unsympathetic pig. That one had been sold. She thought they had more.

I went back by the staircase. They were still romping up it. But they were further away than ever. They were ten-and-nine.

Then I tried bravely to put it away from me altogether. The desire was growing so that it crowded everything else out. It was getting to be not the biggest thing in the picture, but the whole picture. For three months, every time the craving came over me, I tried to keep myself straight by remembering how many children could be made happy if I sent the price of my desire to the Fresh Air Fund.

Then I went to see the doctor.

He said, "You aren't looking so well. What is the matter? Are you working too hard?"

I hadn't done a stroke of work for three months. I couldn't.

"Oh!" I said, stretching out my hands. Then I stopped. I wanted to tell him, but I didn't dare. He might not understand.

"Go out as much as you can into the air," he said, patting my shoulder. "And don't worry; it isn't good for any one."

I determined to do as he said. I felt better for my talk with him. The maid opened the door to let me out. There was a thick fog. It had come up suddenly, and was going to be worse.

I groped my way from Mayfair to Chelsea. When I got home the fire was out. I wanted the elephant more than ever. I couldn't have it, so I



## CHAPTER XXIV

I SAW the King for the first time the other day close to, and it made me feel suddenly queer and excited. My heart throbbed like a Vanguard Omnibus before it starts; my eyes felt hot and shining, and I wanted to go straight up to him and kiss his hands and say, "Please I would like to do something for you." In my excitement I said as much to the woman I was with—she was an American—and she laughed thinly and said, "How absurd, as if you could!" Then I felt as if some one had held me up very high and dropped me, and I hadn't even bounced.

Those sort of people give me the same ashamed feeling I get when I have my favourite nightmare and dream I am in Piccadilly or Collins Street at five in the afternoon with nothing on but a baby's vest. You feel when you have displayed an emotion—even a legitimate one—before a person who hasn't any, that you have been guilty of either shameful indecency or shown yourself an hysterical idiot. It is quite wrong. You might just as well blame yourself for having more hair on your head or more notes in your voice than your neighbour,

but it's a strange thing that people can make you more ashamed of being natural than of almost anything under the sun. She went on talking.

"I suppose you will want to be presented, in time," she scoffed. "It takes a full-blooded democrat or a republican to appreciate the joys of stumbling over so many yards of train and having its name called in the presence of royalty. There's nothing he loves better than the crowns he has forsworn."

"You may be very right from your point of view," I said slowly, "because you *have* forsworn crowns, but you're all wrong from mine, because *we* haven't."

"I don't see what you can know about them or feel about them, all the same," she said. "You live in a place that is ruled by the working man, and I don't suppose till a few months ago you even knew the colour of a King."

"It's because we are a working-class that we recognize a working man when we see one, and we haven't the least objection to him wearing a crown when he can keep the peace as successfully with it on his head. Why should we? He interferes very little. If any one wants to write anything to shake the foundations of the throne, the newspapers are courteously placed at his disposal. If he wants to say it he has the whole of Trafalgar Square to say it in. He isn't gagged or muzzled or hurried away and pent up for the rest of his life

in the wilds of somewhere. He isn't dragged by a brutal soldiery from his position on the steps of the Column, and flung into a gloomy dungeon to await martyrdom. He simply stands up and says what he feels, with no greater restrictions than a cordon of friendly police to keep order. And if he says it well, he is applauded by the sympathetic and the critical alike, and if he says it badly, he only gets half his audience, but every one goes away the better for his outing, and the Crown doesn't stir a hair's-breadth."

"You don't know," she hinted darkly.

"Well, I'm only going by results. We, with an obsolete monarchy, have made one Queen and one King last for seventy years. You must admit that you, with a glorious republic to help you, haven't been half so careful or economical over your presidents."

This made her angry. I knew it would, but I couldn't help it. I am the most peace-loving creature alive, but when some one comes along and accuses me of being an outsider and a hanger-on, and a snob into the bargain, I, as an integral part of the Empire, feel it a sacred duty to hit out.

"It is not our custom to allow a president more than five years of office, and I don't see that you as a nation can pat yourselves on the back because two of your rulers consecutively happen to have iron constitutions," she said short-sightedly.

"That's quite true," I admitted, "but we could

blame ourselves if we interfered with their use of them. The finest constitution in the world won't help you a jot if you have a bullet or the point of a knife sitting right in the middle of your heart. You must own you didn't give the constitutions of *all* the presidents within the last seventy years the chance of breaking down in a natural manner."

The band had finished playing the National anthem, and I had with difficulty refrained from taking off my hat and dancing on it. To ease my feelings I turned and made a bow to the retreating figure of royalty.

"What is that for?" asked the Republican snappishly.

"I was only saying good-bye to a relative of mine," I answered soothingly.

She looked at me as if I were mad.

"A distinguished relative," I explained, "and the Head of Our House. He was sitting in a velvet chair just a moment ago, and they played music with his name to it. Don't you remember, we all got up and stood?"

"Yes, I know," she said; "the man that inspires you twelve thousand miles away with such burning love and loyalty that the moment you are within a few yards of him you long to prostrate yourselves in an agony of frenzied worship before his august arm-chair. It must be a wonderful feeling."

"That's the one, bless him!" I said cheerfully. "And you are right; it *is* rather nice to feel proud

of your representative, and to know that whether you want to or not he makes you like him for something. If we didn't want to kow-tow to him as a King, and hadn't the wit to appreciate him as a diplomat, we would always love him for being the sportsman that he is. Come and have some tea. I am very thirsty, and you sound tired."

That night I had the most extraordinarily vivid dream.

I dreamt I had married some one at Buckingham Palace, and arrived just before dinner. When the gong sounded there was no one ready but the King, and he said, "Come along, we won't wait," so we went down, and when we got to the dining-room it was lunch-time, and there was nothing on the table but a cloth.

The King went over, got the silver basket, and began to put the knives and forks round, but I said, "Here, let me do that." I felt it was not a man's work. When the table was laid we sat down to breakfast. A waiter from the Trocadero came in and put a plate of devilled kidneys before the King, but there was nothing for me. I waited ever so long, and when nothing came I touched the King's coat sleeve—I was very hungry—and said, "Don't you think this is treating me too much like one of the family?" He only smiled pleasantly, said, "Make yourself quite at home," and went on eating.

Then the door opened and the Queen came in.

She sat down, took a piece of toast on to her plate, and said, "Never think, it's a mistake; I gave up thinking years ago." When she had buttered the toast she found she didn't want it, and asked Tony Marrable to hide it, as the King would be very angry if he knew. Tony had *The Times* propped up in front of him, and could have done it easily, but he just said—not a bit the thing Tony would really have said, because he's the sweetest-natured boy in the world—"Don't bother, I'm busy," and went on reading.

I couldn't bear to think of her getting into trouble, so I jumped up very quickly, seized the toast and stuffed it under the table, and she was saved.

All this time the band was playing. At last the King put his hands over his ears and said he couldn't bear it any longer. I said, "Tell them to stop; you can if you're a King," and he said, "No, it might hurt their feelings;" but I told him of a way it could be done without, and he said, "How?" I said, "We'll eat lemons in front of them." He said I was very clever, and asked how I thought of these things, but I said I hadn't thought of it. It was a very old way, and every boy had done it at least once in his life.

We got the lemons and raced off to do it, when suddenly he stopped and looked very sad. I said, "What is the matter?" and he said, "How can a King eat lemons before a band?" He looked so low-spirited over it that I said, "Never mind, there

are heaps of things we want and can't have," and he said, "What?" and I said—thinking of my own troubles—"Cabs at night, and new frocks, and charwomen, and first-class tickets, and the sea in August, and ever so many other things," and he said—— And then I woke up.

Now, why did I dream that?

## CHAPTER XXV

I AM beginning to feel that London is getting just a little too much for me. It's a lovely place to be in if you know that you can get out of it the moment you want, but without that knowledge it's a prison.

At first I thought it rather absurd of people to want a holiday in August whether they could afford it or not, but now I see how it is.

This place is so stressful, so compelling, so inexorable. It is like a great mill that goes steadily, slowly, grinding all the time. Even if you think you are standing aside and only watching you are being ground just the same, only perhaps in a lesser degree.

To merely walk through the streets is enough to take the power out of you if you do it often enough. To walk beside those tumultuous rivers of traffic as they surge along unceasingly. To listen to the thunderous beat of the horses' hoofs, the rumble of the wheels and the roaring and snorting of the huge trembling motors. To watch the thousands of human beings hurrying backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, each with an axe to grind, it



makes your bones feel like lead and your heart like water.

What chance have you, a wretched, miserable, terrified atom, in this pitiless race? Who, with his own fortune to engineer, is going to stop and listen to your weak puling cry for recognition—much less lend you a hand?

Who cares whether you are writing a twopenny-ha'penny book and can't get on with it for want of air?

You are only of use if you are a marketable quantity. You can't be a marketable quantity unless you keep sane, and how can you hope to keep sane in this screaming whirlpool?

I say to myself, "Betty, my girl, this is not the way to get your foot on the neck of it. Range yourself." But it is no use. I want to get out of this great brick box before the lid closes down completely. The winter is coming on, and I, who dread the cold so horribly, and have had three months of it at the beginning of the year—not the worst three months either—feel that half-a-year of it on end in the top flat of newly-built mansions, with no companion but the wind moaning up the staircase, will finish everything.

Then as if to torment me, all sorts of remembrances come crowding back. Tony and the girls and a heap of others, and the picnics and dances and cricket matches we went together. The quiet evenings in the rooms before Maria was engaged,

when Roger would come so frequently to look at her. It was always "Betty, like a dear child play to me," and I would go to the piano and give him the sort of things I would have liked played for *me* if I had been feeling the same way.

And from the corner where the piano stood I would watch out of the tail of my eye and see Roger, as he sat listening, fix his gaze upon Maria's lovely, unconscious face, and it was well we three were alone, because his secrets were not his own under the spell of her beauty, his desire, and my judicious pedallings.

Even Aunt Julie's aldermanic dinners and exasperating bridge parties seem things to be longed for in the distance.

It isn't that I am unhappy really. I would be an ungrateful, ungracious miscreant if I were, with every one so extraordinarily good to me; but I get to feel something as if I had been overtaken by a mental and moral asthma, and I want to walk out in the teeth of the gale and get my lungs cleansed and my heart revived. There seems to be no motion, no life, no pulsation in the atmosphere, and the heaviness of it presses down upon my head and takes the power out of my brain. In Melbourne I lived in the city, but it was at the top of a high building set on a hill. On one side beyond the surrounding suburbs lay the open country stretching out to the foot of the Dandenong

Ranges. On the other side the great bay forty miles wide.

Ten to twelve miles would take you to a part of the seashore where there were no asphalt parades, and the few houses were screened out of sight by a thick belt of ti-tree that grew along the edge of the broken sandy cliffs. And there you could walk for miles on an almost deserted beach, with the salt air blowing upon your face and the sea breaking in at your feet.

Oh, how good it was, with the sun glinting down upon the water and the small fishing boats dancing about over the waves like white-winged butterflies.

And then, as the day wore on, the sun would sink slowly down towards the horizon, and at last drop out of sight behind the sharp sea-line. And the water would change from turquoise to deep dark shades of blue and green and purple, and instead of a play-ground of glittering crested wave-lets it was like a great heart throbbing. That was the way I wanted it most. When the sun was shining it was like a happy child that made you feel glad and young because of its joyousness. But when the sun had gone it was like a woman deserted by her lover, a woman with her heart made big and tender through suffering, who was stretching out her arms and whispering comfort into the ears of all those who came to listen.

Sometimes at night, when I am wanting it very

badly and feel I can't bear things a minute longer, I tie on a small hat and run down the stairs, out into the street and on to the bridge that crosses the river at the foot of the street. And if I lean over the parapet and cover my eyes with my hand to shut out the embankment and the buildings and the gas lamps, I can almost imagine, as the water roars and swirls and eddies through the stone arches, that I am twelve thousand miles away, back on that beach that I never knew how to want properly till I lost it.

## CHAPTER XXVI

**THERE** is nothing I have ever met at home or away from it, that has been able to teach me the true valuelessness and the utter abjectness of my unworthy self like the London dog of society.

An ordinary dog is the same all the world over, and calls for no more attention in one part of the globe than in another. It barks, thieves, fights, works out its salvation in the usual way, and dies when its hour arrives unobtrusively, having unconsciously done the work it was by Providence intended to do. And for that dog there is plenty of good feeling, but no time. If he dies by the dozen he increases by the score, and there is no fear of his going out of print early.

But with these idols of society it is a different matter altogether, and I am still rigid with astonishment at some of the things I have been learning about their private lives.

The other day I went with Cynthia to call upon some one at Queen's Gate. She was a widow who had just married again. A small, slight woman of forty, plain, but with the air of knowing herself to be a beauty. And the belief was so

transcendent that in spite of all the contrary facts staring you in the face, it almost cheated you into accepting her audacious estimate. It's an odd thing what a grip those self-worshipping women get upon the good things of this world. They get the best and the most of everything. They get the best husbands and the most comfort without lifting a finger to please one or gain the other. This one, with no beauty and apparently little wit, had fascinated two husbands who were, according to Cynthia, men of brains, money, muscle, and charm. I can only think she did it by wearing lovely clothes and pretending she knew nothing.

All the while I was there she did nothing but talk about Vera. It bored me rather, but I felt it was nice to see a woman who had been so tremendously spoilt caring obviously about something that wasn't herself. Vera had had a frightful cold. The climate did not suit her at all. She must really go away for the winter.

Now I had not the least idea who Vera was, but as I listened I was touched with sadness to think of a dear little child with golden hair and a weak chest fighting the battle of the London fogs.

I blew my nose sympathetically. Vera's mother went on.

"It has been so bright to-day that I sent her out for a walk, thinking the sun would do her good." Then she rang the bell.

"Is Miss Vera back yet?" she asked the maid.

Miss Vera had just come in. When her outdoor things were taken off, she was to be brought into the drawing-room.

After a while the door opened. A rapt look came into the face of the woman.

"Come, darling," she called tenderly.

And Vera came.

While she was coming I tried to pull myself together. Her breed was pug, and she advertised it by a black accordion-pleated face, a tail like a periwinkle away from home, and a vocal accompaniment of growls, snorts, and wheezes.

Under one ear was a huge pink rosette, and her waddle looked exceedingly difficult.

When she got to the table she was lifted into a silken lap, while adoring hands adjusted her embroidered bib and prepared her tea. My fifteen minutes' allowance was up and I escaped. I wanted to get out into the open to think.

After meeting Vera I got so interested in women and their dogs that I watched every one I saw with one, and the more I watched the more I wondered.

I listened to amazing stories of dogs' tea-parties, of the toys they had to play with, and the governess engaged to amuse them. I heard of their visiting cards and their At Home days, but I never thought I could envy them till one day I saw a fox terrier getting its nose wiped on a real lace handkerchief in Leicester Square. Then the remembrance of my youthful days came crowding back upon me, and

when I thought of the relentless way the nurse-maids used to tweak my unfortunate organ, and compared their attentions with those bestowed upon that undeserving little beast, I felt bitter. For me it was pain and excessive watering at the eyes; for the terrier it must have been sheer luxurious joy.

Another time I was sitting in the park when a lady of much adipose hove in sight. She held a long blue ribbon, and at the extreme end of it was a dog that must have weighed fully eight or nine ounces. Sometimes he walked, sometimes he ran, and sometimes he hung; there was no method in his madness. But at times he got to be too much for what was at the other end of the ribbon, for every now and then she turned to expostulate with him.

Then suddenly he sat down flat and waited. He was pretty close at heel when he sat down, so that the lady walked some distance before she discovered what the obstructionist was up to. When the rope refused to pay out any more she stopped short and spoke. Her voice was heavy with sorrow.

"Edward," she said, "this is more than I can bear; you are wearing me out." Then she walked wearily back to Edward, picked the ruffian up, stuffed him into her pocket and tottered home.

It seems they bring anxieties with them, these angels. I got up and walked away slowly. There was a carriage standing by the kerb, and in it, on a velvet cushion, sat a King Charles spaniel. The



utter boredom in its face, the contemptuous lift of the buttony nose and *blasé* stare of the round goggle eyes fascinated me, and I foolishly looked back.

The supercilious little beast was staring at me with such insolence that I quailed and hurried on.

And I know, as certainly as I know that quarter day will come, that in the few moments it allowed its eyes to rest upon me it had possessed itself of the knowledge that I had a returned manuscript in my pocket, a hole in my glove, and ninepence three-farthings in my cash-box.

## CHAPTER XXVII

I HAVE just come back from a week-end with a rich relative. It was the biggest entertainment I've assisted at for a very long time, and the beauty of it all lay in the fact that I was the Roman who was being butchered to make my own holiday.

It was this way.

Amy Blackwood was the only child of rich and influential parents. Her earliest years were spent under the watchful guidance of tutors and governesses, who were engaged for the purpose of stocking this gentle child with the platitudes that were to be her stay in after life.

No stone was left unturned to make her a success. She had masters for Latin and mathematics, mistresses for French and deportment, and a maid to braid her sandy hair into a pigtail and walk beside her with an umbrella to guard her multitudinous freckles from the sun. For the rest, Mamma and Papa Blackwood took her to church between them on Sunday, taught her to pity the poor, shun the wicked, and cultivate the virtuous and rich, and when the time came for her to be pursued by breath-

less herds of males with intentions mercenary and otherwise, they stood at the turnstiles of that paradise in which the princess was waiting and locked the gates relentlessly upon all whom they considered unworthy of the prize. Amy, who was regarded by her parents as a noble and dutiful daughter, and by others as an empty vessel that would hold whatever was poured into it, and give it out unchanged directly the call came, walked along the lines laid down for her, and in due time married the husband chosen by Papa and Mamma Blackwood.

It was an excellent choice, and Amy's life continued to be the unbroken success it had always been. She lived in a luxurious house, kept two carriages, wore expensive ineffective clothes, that she made a point of giving away in their prime to people who were in straitened circumstances, poor things, and adhered religiously to the teachings of her childhood. She was absolutely virtuous. She never drank or stole or loved unwisely. As a matter of fact, she didn't drink because she happened to like tea and apollinaris water better than anything else. Also she didn't steal because she had everything she wanted, and could have afforded to buy it if she hadn't. And she didn't love unwisely because she couldn't have loved anyway if she tried ever so hard. She was kindly to the rich because they were her own immediate friends, and she pitied the poor because it was what they were made for.

But she really was very good-hearted, and she did her level best to make my week-end with her an enjoyable one.

I went over in time for dinner on Friday. There was a maid to unpack my bag and put out my frock. When I was dressed I went to the drawing-room, where Amy and her husband were waiting, Amy in a gorgeous French dinner-gown that, in spite of all its wonderfulness, could not make her look anything but insignificant. No woman with a narrow chest and a waist up under her arms can expect to score if she wears a tight-fitting bodice. She looked me up and down. My dress was a black net one, of a fashion that would not date any period, carefully designed by me, with the knowledge that it might be some time before I would get another as the motif of its construction.

"That's a very nice, sensible frock," she said kindly; "people who can't afford a variety of clothes should always wear plain, simple things, they are so much more suitable."

After dinner she told me what plans she had made for my amusement.

"Saturday isn't much of a day in London," she said, "but we can shop in the morning, have lunch somewhere, and then go to the Wallace Collection after. We shall have to dine early, as John has taken seats for Wyndham's."

It sounded nice, and I said so.

She said indulgently, "Yes, dear, I would like you to see as much as you can."

Now, unless she was going to spend the morning with Worth or Paquin and take me to lunch at Buckingham Palace, I didn't quite see what she was going to show me that I hadn't seen before. But it sounded worth waiting for.

In the morning I put on a frock that seemed to me trim enough for morning and smart enough for afternoon. It was a golden-brown, rough canvassy thing, made over silk and trimmed with velvet buttons and pipings and kilted glacé frillings. I wore long brown gloves, brown shoes, and a small brown velvet hat with a feather in it. Amy came down trailing clouds of chiffon after her. We got into the carriage and drove away.

"You choose your clothes very well," she said approvingly.

"Do you like this?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "it is quite nice. Very simple, but that is all the better for you, dear, as I suppose you go out very little, and must want but few smart clothes."

"We are going to Woolland's first," she went on. "I have one or two little things to buy, and I thought you would like to see what is being worn. You might get some ideas."

Her voice suggested that my shopping was usually done at the Hammersmith barrows late on a Saturday night. I was one of the class invented

for her to pity, and in time might hope for some of the half-worn dresses. I wanted to laugh, but was too much of a lady.

"It is rather a good place," I admitted; "this hat came from there."

She looked as surprised as if some one had smacked her.

"You go to Woolland's?" she gasped. "How on earth do you manage it? It is a most *expensive* place."

"I don't buy my own things there," I explained, "but I send things out to Maria, and it was she who gave me the hat."

"Oh," she said, apparently relieved. "I suppose you got it at sale time. I believe if you keep your eyes open you can get things quite cheaply at sale time."

I *hadn't* bought it at sale time, but I felt if I told her the truth she might expire on the floor of the victoria, so I said nothing.

When we got to Woolland's she bought some ribbons and gloves and things, and presented me with a spangled hair ornament. "It will smarten up your black frock, dear, if you should be asked out to dinner at any time." There was a note of genuine compassion in her voice that made the ladies behind the counter look at me with interest. It must be sad to be a person of apparently some breeding and to have only one evening frock, and that a black one that needed the assistance of a

spangled hair ornament to make it fit for a possible dinner-party.

I never wear spangled hair ornaments, but I hadn't the heart to deprive her of the pleasure she was getting in bestowing it, so I said, "Thank you, Amy, you are very thoughtful," and took it graciously.

We went to the Carlton to lunch. Just as she seemed to imagine that my clothes were bought in the open air at Hammersmith, so I think she pictured me lunching at Pearce & Plenty's and teaing at Lockhart's.

She led me into the dining-room much as Dr. Barnardo might have taken one of his waifs to the first square meal of its lifetime, and she sat me down, beaming expectantly over the table at me to see how I would bear up under the influence of so much magnificence.

"It always seems to me," I said, leaning back in my chair and looking languidly round, "as if this room were designed for the express purpose of snapping its fingers at the people who patronize it."

"How—what do you mean?" asked Amy in an astonished tone.

"It's the colour scheme," I said. "Whenever one dines here one has to select a frock that is subservient to and harmonizes with the decorations. You can't choose the one that will make you look nicest because very likely, with the upholstering of

the chairs for a background, it would make every one else ill."

"You have been here before?" said Amy, looking suddenly very flat.

"Yes, and the first time I came I sat near a woman dressed in tomato red. It was a lovely frock really, but in this room it was like trumpets and motor horns and cymbals braying and tooting and banging all together."

"Fancy," said Amy faintly.

I nodded.

"Yes," I said, "since that I never wear anything but white when I dine here."

"Oh," said Amy again.

Perhaps I was hard, but I think I successfully prevented her making the waiter as sorry for me as Woolland's young ladies were. That was something.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

AFTER lunch we went to the Wallace Collection. It was an uneventful progress. Whether Amy had temporarily lost heart at the Carlton, or whether she thought that as this was an entertainment for which nothing could be paid, it obviously was fitter that I should be on familiar terms with it than she should, I don't know. Anyhow we got through quite nicely, and she didn't attempt to do the honours even when we went to eat at Verrey's.

When I was dressing for dinner I remembered the spangled ornament and put it into my hair. It made me look quite ten years older and, between you and me, rather common and ordinary, but I felt I owed it to Amy to make the sacrifice, for I am sure she was industriously and scientifically trying to thrash out all the amusement that could be got from an out-of-season week-end in town, and all for my benefit.

At dinner she remarked upon it.

"Betty looks quite smart to-night, doesn't she, John?" she said to her husband.

John glanced up from his soup and answered, dutifully saying the only thing there was for him to say—

"She looks very nice indeed; but she always does," and went on with his soup.

I waited for Amy to explain why I was looking smart, and to give her reasons for purchasing and presenting the glittering decoration that was the means of saving me from oblivion, but she contented herself with casting her eyes upon it every now and then with an air of interest and proprietorship as much as to say, "See how grand we have made the little Cinderella. What a happy child she is in her fine feathers!" And me all the while feeling as if I must be looking like a suburban lady mayoress on a civic jamboree! And trying not to mind.

She seemed to have picked up her spirits again with the sight of the hair ornament, for as we drove to the theatre she tried very hard to overcome the embarrassment I must of necessity be suffering in my suddenly exalted circumstances.

It was as if the kindly soul had guessed how disconcerted and abashed I would feel at being driven by powdered lackeys in an elegant carriage to a plush-covered seat in an expensive part of the theatre. I, who when the half-crown was forthcoming, hurried on the outside of a 'bus to take my chance at the pit's mouth, and snatched nourishment in the intervals from a ginger-beer bottle and a parcel of sandwiches wrapped in yesterday's newspaper!

We went into the *foyer* and took the passage,

not to the boxes, not to the stalls, but the dress-circle! I must say it was rather a shock to me. Not that it mattered a bit, but after all the fuss Amy made I expected that we should at least have had the Royal Box with a banner hanging from it.

When we had settled ourselves—we had very good seats, the middle of the front row—Amy turned to me and began her guide-book tricks again.

"I suppose," she said, after she had shown me the house, "you don't often come to this part, dear? You would go to the pit?"

"No," I said, "I have only been here once before. When I come I generally go there—or there." I leaned forward and wagged my head first at the boxes and then at the stalls.

John roared. "My word, Amy, that was a facer!" he said when he had finished laughing. "Betty got home on you there. I'm afraid she is one too many for us."

Amy laughed, but not so heartily as John did. "She is quite a grand person," she said good-naturedly, but with an odd look of perplexity in her eyes. She was right out in her bearings, and couldn't help being worried by it. In her orderly little mind there were two worlds, the rich and the poor. I could not belong to the first because I had no money, and I evidently didn't belong to the second because I was not to be pitied.

"Do you see some one you know?" she asked, as I bowed affectionately into one of the boxes.

"Yes, the Ambassador for G——," I said, with enthusiasm. "I met him at a luncheon party, and he is a dear. He let me talk about myself and what I am going to do, like——" I was just going to say "like the Youngest Man and the Doctor always do," but I nipped it off my tongue in time and said, "like anything. And I loved him because he thought as I did upon things—some things."

"What things?" asked Amy curiously.

"Oh, about feelings and things. If he feels glad or sorry he can't help showing it, and what's more he doesn't want to. I can't help it either, but I feel ashamed sometimes of feeling before people who aren't feeling; do you understand? It made me more comfortable after I had talked with him and found he was the same. I don't like being different from other people."

It seemed to me as if Amy looked at me rather respectfully, but she didn't understand, I could see.

"What funny things to talk about at lunch," she said wonderingly.

"They weren't really, because they came quite naturally," I said.

Then the lights went down and the curtain went up, and we didn't talk any more, but the bow to the Ambassador did for me at the theatre what the comment on colour schemes had done at the Carlton. It surprised Amy into leaving me alone for a while. I am afraid she is really a bit of a snob.

It was all too funny to be annoyed over, but the humour of it would have got a trifle strained if it had lasted longer than a week-end.

Next day—Sunday—a lot of people came in to tea, and she introduced me, sympathetically explaining in a voice that was meant to be an aside, but was quite audible to those for whom it was not intended, that I was one of the Beresfords of Melbourne. "Were very rich, my dear, but the father and mother died when she and her sister were mere children, and left them with nothing. Very sad, wasn't it?"

Every time I heard every word of it, and after the first time I watched the people's faces to see how they took it. Just one or two dropped into Amy's attitude, and were genuinely and solemnly commiserating, but the others, poor things, how uncomfortable they were! They looked first at me to see if I had heard it, then at Amy to see if she was aware that I *might* hear it, then at me again because they knew I *had* heard it, and when I looked away into nothing they mumbled something and quickly began another topic.

The last one to hear the story was a man, a nice man with a kind face and that fascinating ripply hair that lies smooth and short and close to the head. He bowed, stared slightly as if something had surprised him, glanced at Amy keenly for a second, and then looked away and recovered himself.

When at last he looked at me Amy had gone and I was staring gravely at him.

"It is very sad, isn't it?" I said, shaking my head sorrowfully.

He did not say anything, but his mouth relaxed ever so little, then his eyes twinkled, and finally he laughed outright.

"That is the only way to take it," said I approvingly.

He looked at me very closely for a moment or two.

"I think we could be very good friends," he answered irrelevantly but in no way impertinently.

And so we were all that afternoon.

I went home on Monday afternoon. At breakfast Amy said, while Benton was handing me muffins, "I can't drive you home this morning, dear, as I want the horses for the afternoon, but I will send you in a hansom. And as it is such a nice morning you may tell him to drive you through the Gardens. It is a longer way round, but that won't make much difference, and it will be a treat for you."

Later on, when the maid was in my bedroom packing my bag, she came and sat down on the bed.

"I hope you have had a nice time," she said, in a voice that made me feel as if some one were untying my bib, removing the traces of bread and jam and milk from my lips, and letting me down from

my high chair. "You have been quite a success. Every one was taken with you yesterday afternoon. You must come again, dear. It must be lonely in your rooms with no one but the charwoman."

I know that it is not given to many to be heroes to their own valets, but at least one might reasonably expect to stand well in the opinion of other people's. As it was, Amy's behaviour made it necessary for me to bestow prohibitive tips upon all her staff that I might have a few rags of decency in which to clothe myself before their merciless gaze.

Taking everything into consideration I don't think I can afford to stay with rich relatives of that type.

## CHAPTER XXIX

SOMEHOW everything seems wrong. I *ought* to be happy. I've got a dear little place to live in, with papers of my own choosing on the walls, and a piano and an elephant to keep me from being lonely.

I *ought* to be contented. I am living the life I asked for, and getting recognition much more easily than I expected, certainly with much less labour than a great many who have been longer at it, which means that the luck is with me. I've got as many friends as I can want and more acquaintances than I should have, considering I am here to work and not to play. Yet in the teeth of all that I feel discontented and restless and quite unable and unwilling to do anything, even go out and enjoy things.

There must be something quite wrong, because I am not interested in clothes, and I've never known that to happen before.

Perhaps it is because I wanted so badly to go to the sea in August, and instead had to walk about London with its streets empty and its blinds drawn down, while every one I knew was away gallivant-



ing. Or perhaps it is because it is November now, and you can't see across the road for fog, and never will be able to again by the feel of things.

I got a letter from the Youngest Man this morning. He is in Scotland. Rather an odd time of the year to be in Scotland, I should think, but he has relatives there. I met some one the other day who knows them. She says his cousin is lovely. I shall go and see the doctor again. He may be able to give me something in a bottle that will make me more anxious to be alive than I am at present. Anyhow, I am pretty sure of being able to entrap him into a discussion of some kind, and I always feel better after crossing swords with him. The last time it was an entrancing conversation upon the Effect of Noses on People's Careers. When I came out, the waiting-room, which is the entrance-hall, was thronged with impatient (I meant that) who had been collecting during the sixty minutes' conversation, and were all sitting with their eyes glued upon the door through which I was to come as if one more minute and they would rush it. He is a great comfort to me, that doctor. It would be just as hard for me to give him up as it would be for a man to give up smoking, or a woman tea-drinking. I hope he gets some pleasure out of it too, because just at present that is all he *does* get. Some day, when the book comes out and is a great success, I shall shatter his nervous system by demanding my bill. For the while he is quite safe.

## CHAPTER XXX

"CLOTHES, *clothes*," said The Doctor contemptuously, "of course they don't count!"

"You don't think so?" I asked, with interest.

"I know they don't. For my part I never know what a woman has on. If she interests me, I like her; if she doesn't, I don't, and all the frills and chiffons in the world wouldn't make me like her any more or any less."

He pulled out a piece of paper, and went on writing a prescription. I looked at him to make sure he was busy, and then craned my neck to get a sight of myself in the pier-glass. I know those men who pride themselves on never seeing what a woman has on. You've got to be twice as careful with them as with any others, because they see twice as much.

I gave my hat the imperceptible tilt it needed, settled the lace at my throat, and went down into the arena.

"You mightn't know if they were piped or tucked or shirred or French-hemmed, but you would know if they fitted badly or if they were the wrong colours," I objected.

"I should not. If the woman pleased me I should know nothing but that she pleased me. If she didn't, she wouldn't enter into my calculations."

"But if she pleased you and dressed well, wouldn't she please you more than if she just pleased you and didn't dress well?"

"No, it wouldn't make any difference."

I sat musing for a while.

"I am afraid I am not like that," I said thoughtfully. "Not that anything would alter my real feelings for people. My friends are my friends, but I can't help liking them, not less on their ugly days, but better on their good-looking ones."

"You would save yourself a lot of trouble if you did not allow yourself to be affected by externals," he said, as he covered the prescription with blotting-paper, and drew his fist over it with a decisive sweep.

"You might save yourself a lot of trouble, but you would lose yourself a lot of pleasure. You wouldn't suffer ugliness perhaps, but you wouldn't appreciate beauty. It is the appreciation of beauty that helps to keep you young, and I intend to be young till I die."

"I think you will be," he said, looking at me critically.

"I know I shall," I said; "I am going to be a virtuous revival of Ninon de l'Enclos, and wear sailor hats and send lovers away heart-broken when I am ninety."

"I have never seen it recorded that Ninon de l'Enclos wore sailor hats at any age," he said, "but I certainly hope you won't."

"Why not?"

"Because they are most unbecoming. The straight hard line above the face never suits any one. Nothing could be prettier than what you have on now, or the one with the tufty things in it you wore last time you came to see me. Stick to what you have; you can't better it."

I looked at him closely, but he was quite unconscious.

"You liked that one?" I asked.

"Yes, it reminded me of what used to be the fashion when I was a boy. Folded turban arrangements; they made a woman look very fascinating," he said retrospectively.

Oh, but men are very interesting things.

## CHAPTER XXXI

I HAVE been getting into disgrace with my own countrymen, and according to them have sinned so deeply that I am no longer worthy to be called an Australian.

It happened this way:

A certain Club—my Club—fired with the spirit of Imperialism and a desire for closer communion with all nations, invited its members to collect together under their different flags and discuss questions that were of interest and importance to their own particular circles.

To all outward appearances this was merely an opportunity for tea and gossip with your fellow-sojourners in London; but to those who knew, it had a far deeper meaning. It was the planting of a tiny seed that would, in time, blossom into a tree of peace, under whose shade all the ends of the earth would come together in love and unity. It was one more feather towards the bed on which the lion and the lamb would ultimately lie down so harmoniously beside one another. It was the striking of another hour by the clock of the millennium.

So the Germans gave a party and the Russians

gave a party, and the Americans gave a party, and every other circle gave a party and invited its representative wit and wisdom to grace it.

And the Australians gave a party. For long hours we—the council—sat to consider what should be done. We were quite earnest and whole-hearted about it. The inaugural meeting should be one that would stamp itself indelibly upon the minds of those who attended. While desiring to make it as attractive as possible the seriousness of the aim must not be lost in a natural but unworthy effort to popularize the gatherings. If we were fortunate enough to be able to combine social success with the advancement of The Cause, so much the better, but before everything, The Cause itself.

The result of the conclave was that we should send out invitations for a reception, at which the Australian as a type should be freely discussed both as he is seen and as he sees himself. I was to write a short paper that was to set the ball rolling, and the honoured guests of the evening would be asked to criticize and reply. I went home absorbed in the fulfillment of my mission.

It had devolved upon me to draw for those who were to be assembled a faithful portrait of myself and my brother native.

Practically, I was invited to perform a surgical operation upon my soul, and I must do it without flinching and without blenching.

If there were beauties they must be touched upon

lightly and modestly, if there were uglinesses they must not be hidden. It should be a banquet of Reason presided over by the spirit of relentless Truth.

If my eye offended I would pluck it out, if my hand did the same I would cut it off.

Personally, if my eye has to come out or my hand to be cut off, I should prefer doing it myself to letting an unsympathetic and, in all probability, a prejudiced bungler hack at me, but that is neither here nor there. I shut myself in the flat for two days, made a close study of the subject, and this is what I wrote—

"We as a race lack much, but it must be remembered that we were born a very short time ago and are still very young.

"If the present-day native is more butterfly than bee, and more sportsman than thinker, it is because the conditions of life in Australia tend to make him so. Unfettered by convention, happy in the sunshine and without a thought for the morrow, he swings easily and confidently along the path hewn out in strife and sweat and peril by the sturdy pioneers who preceded him.

"He understands space and distance and freedom, because they are characteristic of the land to which he belongs, but he has no comprehension of time. That which happens must happen quickly or not at all. Things are not the outcome of steady, persevering toil or patient endurance. Ex-

cept to the bushmen, who live their strenuous, silent lives far from the centres of civilization, or to those of a past generation, such words convey little or nothing.

"By reason of the way in which money is to be made the spirit of gambling has become an inheritance.

"A man takes up great tracts of land and turns it into a cattle or sheep station—or at least he did. Now, owing to a condition brought about by devastating droughts, it is not so common a form of speculation. A few good seasons will make him a millionaire; a good many bad ones a pauper.

"Another on the fields—the gold-fields—without a whole shirt to his back, makes a lucky find. Next week he has his racing stables, and his wife is wearing diamonds in her teeth. In a little while again, through speculating, his wife may be doing her own washing, and he is back on the fields, probably putting together a larger fortune than the one he has lost.

"Under such influences and conditions, in a land engaged in exploiting its vast mineral wealth, it is small wonder that the native Australian grows up an irresponsible, happy-go-lucky dare-devil.

"He gets money easily, he gets rid of it easily, and when it is gone shrugs his shoulders and says cheerfully, 'Come and have a drink.'

"He has no reverence for anything, because reverence is the outcome of centuries of tradition, of



generations of belief inborn and inbred, and with the most ancient city in the Commonwealth barely more than one hundred years old, there is nothing for him to take off his hat to.

"If he comes to London it is ten to one he hates it and wants to get back again. He misses the freedom and openness of home. He is stifled by the immensity of the city, and cramped by the miniature beauty of the country.

"And above all nobody knows him. He walks for days through miles of streets without meeting one familiar face. He is lonely in the crowd, and longs to return to the place where every second person greets him, if not as a friend, as an acquaintance.

"So he calls this England cold and standoff, because it is unconscious of his existence, and small because it has to house in one block as much humanity as goes to the making of a good-sized country town on the other side. He is like the child at the party who suddenly discovers that his nurse has left it, and like the big, simple, overgrown baby that he is, he screws his knuckles into his eyes and 'wants to go home.'

"Metaphorically speaking, he comes into the world's drawing-room with a cigarette in his mouth and his hat on the back of his head, and having calmly taken possession of the best chair in the room he proceeds to put his feet upon the mantelpiece. He has been a law unto himself from the

time of his birth, and to recognize any other is to forfeit his claim to independence.

"He objects to observe what to an Englishman would be the most ordinary conventionalities, for fear it may be thought he is putting on side, and his frock-coat, with its attendant horrors, is a skeleton that is only spirited out of the wardrobe on rare occasions by the tyrannical tears and entreaties of his women kind.

"But with all his rawness he is a clean-minded, soft-hearted child, and will remain a child to the end of his days. He will genuinely make your griefs his own, and if you need it will give you all he has, and rifle the pockets of the next man if that is not enough.

"He is essentially emotional. Tell him so, and he will probably pass it over in silence. Self-analysis is not his besetting sin, therefore he doesn't know what you are driving at. Explain the meaning, and he will most certainly scoff. But it is true all the same, only it is a purely natural emotionalism and quite unconscious.

"He laughs when he is happy, weeps when he is sad, and rages when he is angry, for the same reason that he sleeps when he is tired and eats when he is hungry. He feels like it, that is all.

"This emotionalism is climatic. It is the nature of the land to which he belongs, a land of great contrasts, of magnificent seasons and terrible droughts, of dense forests and arid plains. Every-

thing is superlative. If it is hot it is a furnace; if it is wet, a deluge.

"And the result is a breed that can understand no half-measures and will admit of no curb. He is the glorious free-born, and will enjoy his inheritance to the full. Self-restraint is foolish, other restraint is impertinent.

"So he has got to stub his toes against a good many rocks before he is alive to the fact that for his own personal comfort it would be wiser to walk round obstacles that are as immovable as the Pyramids.

"He has had no sorrow to speak of, he is the unwhipped school-boy of nations, and when he comes to table with the grown-ups his experience if of necessity small, and his behaviour occasionally trying. But as he has only lived years to other nations' centuries, and those years, it must be remembered, have been lived in geographic isolation, it is scarcely surprising.

"Perhaps his chiefest stumbling-block is the fact that, after all, he is rather a wonderful child and can't help knowing it. But when time has given him the experience he needs through the mistakes he is too busily engaged in making, it is certain that he will have a reputation away from home for other qualifications than his good cricket and his bad manners.

"And with all his faults it is also certain that he is an improvement upon the type of Englishman

who spends his mornings in the Park, his afternoons in the drawing-room, and his nights and substance at the bridge-table, and who lounges through life too well-pursed for a calling and too well-bred for an emotion."

I finished it, read it over carefully, then I sighed and struck out the last paragraph. After all this was an analysis of one, not a comparison of two types, and it was scarcely courteous to attack the Englishman in his own house. Looking at it critically it was about the best paragraph in the thing, but above everything one must be always the little gentleman.

I blotted the MS. and put it away. Whatever else I had done I had prevented an outsider enumerating our faults by doing it very carefully myself. I had spiked the enemy's guns, and for that, if for nothing else, my compatriots should bless me.

Then I waited calmly the reward of my labours.

## CHAPTER XXXII

THE night arrived. All the guests had been received in the big dining-hall, which was cleared for the occasion. Politics, commerce, art, literature, were all represented, and at least five diamond necklaces and three tiaras winked and blinked under the chandeliers. Nothing more could be wanted to make a successful audience.

The official guests, with their wives, had been led to their seats in the semi-circular forefront, and the others had arranged themselves to their liking in the chairs behind.

The member of the council who was to read the paper detached herself from the conversation she was engaged in, and stepping on to the hassock from which she was to read, spoke a few preliminary words, telling the name of the writer and the subject, and then she began.

I was sitting just behind her, and with a full view of the audience. At first I didn't take any notice of them, because I was listening to the paper. I was interested to hear how it sounded from the lips of others. I wanted it to smite upon my ears as a new thing, that I myself might criticize better.

But after a while something in the air, some-

thing electric, made me look up and out into the sea of faces before me. For the most part they were politely interested, some more, some less than others. Then I began to search for those individuals from whom I would naturally expect support, those who would be generous and just enough to desire truth before flattery, those who would be diplomatic enough to say, "It is indeed wise that we should rob our enemies of their deserved criticism by being our own judges, and subtle that we should discover our obvious imperfections, thereby leaving for them nothing to catalogue but our perfections."

I looked and I looked and I looked. In the faces of all those to whom I turned there was nothing but sheer rank hostility. The brow of one woman was clothed with such thunderous wrath that I thanked God there and then that nature had made it impossible for me to be her husband, and Providence had not ordained that she should be my mother. Some of the men who did not look outraged and indignant, had set their mouths in a patient questioning smile that said, "Who is this youthful babbler who has lost her coral and bells and has taken a pen to play with instead?" But their lips went down and not up as they smiled.

And others had deliberately closed their ears and their understandings, and were mentally drumming their heels till this blasphemy should have run its course, and they would be free to rise and strike.

It ended.

After it came a paper on the arts by a well-known Australian writer, and after that, the deluge.

The first man rose to reply. He began by thanking the woman who followed me for her charming and delightful dissertation. As every Australian knew, that which came from the pen of such a writer could not fail to interest and instruct.

But the other paper. He hardly knew what to say, because he did not know if it were intended seriously or as a jest. If it were a jest, then of course he could do what he had several times wanted to do, and that was to laugh. If it were not, he could only say that never in all his life had he met or known of an Australian who fitted the portrait. His experience, which was a much longer and perhaps much deeper one than that of the charming young lady (oh torture!) who was responsible for the pamphlet, made it incumbent upon him to say that while the wit and epigram were most entertaining, the idea of regarding it as a likeness must not be considered for a moment.

He did not like to go deeply into it, for it embarrassed him to criticize a lady, so he would simply add that he had learnt many things in the last half-hour he never knew before, and leave it for others to carry on the discussion. He must explain that he did not put his feet upon the mantel-piece, nor had he ever seen it done.

The moment he sat down another was invited

to continue the massacre, and with avidity he rose to do it.

He was an Australian born and bred, and he never ceased thanking Providence for the fact. He had travelled from North to South and East to West, but the only man he had ever seen that in any way resembled the sketch was an Englishman he met in Adelaide.

He did not know the writer personally, but he would say that he had very little patience with globe-trotters who came out, stayed a week at each port, and returned to England to write a book upon what they had seen. He indignantly denied ever having put his feet on the mantel-piece. A little more in the same strain, then *he* sat down.

The next one took it bit by bit and demolished it. He also was an Australian, and gloried in the fact. If any man with his two feet upon the earth understood the practical meaning of hard work, it was the Australian. If he had a fault, it was that he was too humble, and placed too small a valuation upon his own merits. The bump of reverence was so abnormally developed that it almost spoilt the contour of his head (he didn't actually use those words, but that was what he implied). For the rest he denied utterly that Australian women ever wore diamonds in their teeth, or that the men put their feet upon the mantel-piece. He had never done it, he had never seen one of his friends do it, and he did not believe it ever *was* done. The



whole thing was a gross libel upon his countrymen, and he was glad indeed of the opportunity afforded him to refute it in the presence of "those here to-night."

There were no speakers from the English point of view. I don't wonder. No outsider would have dared to face such a storm as I had unconsciously raised about my defenceless head. I who had striven so earnestly to eliminate the personal, and be strictly impartial in a judgment where partiality might naturally be expected to creep in. This was the reply to my disinterestedness, this was the return for two days' hard labour and solitary confinement, with my head wrapped in a damp cloth, and my back turned resolutely upon pleasure.

I sat and pondered over things while the meeting broke up and formed into groups.

"Miss Beresford, Mr. ——" I didn't catch his name—"wishes to be introduced to you." I turned and saw a woman I had met rather often at the Club, at my elbow. Beside her was a quiet-looking, dark man.

He bowed. "I would like to congratulate you upon your paper to-night," he said pleasantly.

"Do you mean the paper itself or the effect it produced?" I asked, smiling rather ruefully.

He laughed.

"I mean the paper itself. Those who got up unconsciously corroborated a great deal of what you said, by their attitude towards it. In my opinion

it was a very life-like picture of the Australian as I know him."

"Do you know him well?" I inquired. This man was balm to my wounded spirit.

He laughed again.

"I ought to," he said; "I am one."

"According to this evening's happenings it does not always follow," said I. "Why didn't you uphold me?"

"I didn't get the chance," he replied. "I was wanting to be asked to speak."

"It would have been more than your life was worth," I said.

I can't help thinking if I had left that paragraph in about the Englishman the storm would not have been so violent.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

THE Youngest Man returned from Scotland a week ago and yesterday afternoon he came to tea.

It *was* nice to have him back again! Till he came I really didn't quite know how much I had missed him.

He sent me a note, saying if he did not hear to the contrary he would call at about four o'clock, so I wired to him to come, and set about killing the fatted calf in honour of his return. That meant buying all the flowers the green-grocer had, turning the sitting-room out myself, tying a new blue sash round the elephant's waist, and putting on my best pair of silk stockings.

The first two things—buying the flowers and turning the room out myself—were not a mark of any especial favour. I am always glad of the slightest excuse to spend money on flowers, but without a reason greater than my own desire I refrain more often than not. When I make money with my books, I shall have them all over the house, and sticking in the key-holes as well, to make up for lost time. Turning the room out myself is a

remnant of housewifely care not yet eradicated by the artist.

As for the elephant's sash, he does love being smart, the darling! It is always a red-letter day for him when the Youngest Man comes, because they are such friends. The Youngest Man always treats him courteously and with a regard that cannot fail to please. That went a long way to making me respect him. He seemed to take it for granted that the elephant was necessary to me, and being that, he did not dream of taking him any other way than seriously. Beside that I think he is really rather fond of him.

But the silk stockings! It is at that point that the tide of favouritism reaches its high-water mark. I put it to you. If you had three pairs, two of which were worn out, and there was not even a remotely speculative possibility of new ones, would you not consider that every time you put them on you were performing a religious ceremony and sacrificing your ewe lamb on the high altar? I do not take those stockings out often or regard them lightly. Sometimes they are put on when I am quite alone. Then it is that they are needed to whip up my fainting self-esteem, to remind me that if only I can keep up my courage the time *will* come when I shall not be forced to suffocate between unwashed humans in nerve-destroying omnibuses, when I shall not sit at home waiting for cheques that come as single spies and rejected manuscripts

that return in battalions, when editors and publishers in person will pant up the stairs, only to be told by a lofty hireling (no charwoman then) that his mistress is not receiving that day, and has not authorized him to say when she will be. And I shall stand well concealed behind the curtains and watch them dispiritedly retracing their steps and exiting into the street again. That will be my joy. And the elephant shall have a new blue sash every day.

When the silk stockings bring visions of that kind is it any wonder that I hesitate to put them on unless there is reason for it? The Youngest Man little knows the exaltedness of his position.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

I OPENED the door and made a curtsy. "Come in," I said; "the elephant will indeed be glad to see you."

"I don't see why you should put it all on to the elephant," he said, looking round for a hat-rack, and following me into the sitting-room when he had made his usual discovery that there wasn't one.

"The elephant is young, and has not yet learnt the necessity for hiding his feelings, nor has he knowledge of the value of speech."

"What is it?" he asked thoughtlessly.

"Speech was given to us to conceal our thoughts," I replied, with patience. I hope Scotland hasn't made him stupid. I can usually rely upon him understanding what I mean before I have said it. Besides, that was so very obvious.

He sat down on the couch—the thing I bought the last time I was more than usually hard up—took the elephant upon his knee and played with its sash ends, while he looked at me inquiringly.

"It could not be that you wish to imply that you have ever hidden your real feelings or used speech

for the purpose of concealing your thoughts?" he asked, raising his eyebrows ever so slightly.

His tone nettled me. I suppose because I am naturally so indecently apparent I have a secret desire to be thought cryptic.

"I do not always say——" I began rather loftily.

He threw his head back and laughed.

"My dear child, you do, always! You may not always think what you say, but you *always* say what you think. Just at present you won't say you are glad to see me, although you know you are, very. But in a little while you won't think what you are saying, and then you will say what you think. I shall get it sooner or later."

"It has often been a matter of wonder to me," I said, "how you, who undervalue yourself so absurdly, should ever have become the success that you are." I was genuinely annoyed.

"Poor child!" he said indulgently; "did it want to be a little Machiavelli, and wouldn't its nature let it then? It's too bad!"

"And please don't call me 'child' so often. When one gets to my age, the difference in years between you and me is nothing. When you were twenty and I was a minute, you might have been excused if you failed to recognize my significance. When I was sixteen, I could well imagine you patronizing me. But not now. I am catching up with you, and it won't be so many years before I am right alongside. Also, you aren't such a very dig-

nified person yourself when you leave off your professional manner. I caught you making faces at yourself in the glass the last time I was reading to you. I don't call that being frightfully grown up."

There was a mirror exactly opposite. He looked up into it, and began in a thoughtful way to make what is known to children as "rabbit's mouths." It is a fascinating face.

"You do it," he said, interestedly watching himself. I began to do it, and was soon lost in the pleasure of it. He turned and looked at me absorbedly for a moment or two, then we laughed one of those laughs that can't help themselves.

"Oh!" I said; "it is nice to have you back again!"

A light shot into his eyes, but he was wise enough to sacrifice his opportunity.

"Come and let's make the tea," he said. "I want mine badly."

We went down into the kitchen, and he prowled round while I was buttering the scones.

"I am going to look into the cupboard," he said, opening the door; "I always feel as if a look into a cupboard was a glimpse into a soul."

"It sounds well," I said, "but it works out rather badly. According to that, my soul is full of empty bottles very badly arranged by the new charwoman, and yours, yours would be full of clothes very carefully arranged and laid there by your man. It hasn't many possibilities, has it?"



"There is also a private cupboard," he suggested.

I made the tea, and we carried it back to the sitting-room. It is quite beautiful to think of the Youngest Man as he is in his profession. To imagine him in Court standing gravely in his wig and gown, while he ties the poor innocent defendant up in his own foolish words, and leads the undeserving plaintiff on to victory. Then to watch him in my flat, laboriously trying to carry a small brown teapot and a jug of hot water without spilling them or burning his fingers.

When I had poured out his tea and handed him the cake, I took my own and retired with the elephant to the most comfortable chair in the room.

We did not speak for a while. I was thinking deeply, and he seemed hungry.

At last he broke the silence.

"This is very good cake," he said.

"Yes," I said absently. Then I looked at him long and searchingly. "Yours and my cupboard wouldn't be the least bit alike."

He smiled. "Wouldn't they? Why not?"

"Oh, for every reason under heaven."

It seemed to amuse him.

"What would my cupboard be like?" he asked.

"You ask me that because you think I don't know. You don't ask me what mine is like because you think you *do* know."

"Surely two very good reasons for asking and not asking a question. Tell me about mine."

"Yours," I said slowly and reflectively, "yours would be just as orderly and well arranged as the ones your man keeps for you. There would be exasperating dignified piles of requirements set in their own particular places so that you could go any time in the dark and put your hand on what you wanted without a moment's hesitation. You would never accumulate rubbish, your lack of sentiment would prevent your doing that. You would have just what you needed and nothing more. All else would be foolishness, and you could very much more easily do a wicked act than a foolish one. There would be no surprises, and therefore no disappointments. It would be all so calm and well regulated, so reliable, so—so dull!"

I said it savagely because somewhere something was hurting me, and I suddenly felt a desire to lash out insensately.

"And yours?"

"Mine would be a lovely one! Always untidy and chaotic, but full of surprises and excitement, because you would never know what you were coming across. When you went for a handkerchief you would find a diamond brooch; when you thought you were going to get a pair of gloves, you would pull out an enthralling book that hadn't come to the top for ever so long. It would be like living at a bazaar, and being able to have as many dips in the bran-pie as ever you wanted without paying anything for it."

"I would not be surprised if you had to pay occasionally," he said quietly, "and after all a diamond brooch wouldn't be much comfort to you if you had a cold in your nose."

"That is so like you," I said insultingly. "It is one of those sensible, useful things you keep in piles in your clockwork cupboard. No wonder you can find them easily. I saw that one before you opened the door."

What had taken possession of me I don't know. I only know I had to go on or else I should have cried. There was no reason in it. I had had no provocation; and here I was saying things that were neither clever nor amusing, but flippant and impertinent; things that should have been treated with a dose of magnesia and a whipping.

More than ever I say that the Youngest Man is an exceptionally wise one. When I had finished, he took out his cigarette-case and handed it to me, not as if he were indifferent to what I had said, but kindly and considerately. I shook my head.

"No, thank you," I said limply.

"May I?"

"Of course."

He took one out, lighted it, then went over and opened the piano.

"Play to me while I smoke," he said coaxingly. "You know how I like it."

I sat down and played till all the anger and badness and acheyness had run out the ends of my fin-

gers. When I got up I had forgotten everything.

We sat a while and talked about all sorts of nice interesting nothings; then he went. As he took up his hat it came over me again what I had said. I stretched out my hands.

"I am sorry," I said. "I don't know why I did it, except that I was jealous of your tidy cupboard, and angry because I could never make mine like it, no matter how hard I were to try."

He took my hands, and looked down at me in a dear comforting way.

"Little stupid," he said, smiling, "be just as you are, and don't bother about what any one else is. There are many delightful things in your cupboard that you might spoil if you tried to alter them. I can't help being tidy, and I don't want to. You can't help being untidy, and you needn't want to either. There are lots of people who will keep it in decent order for you. And let them. You have other things to do."

"My cupboard is a nice cupboard, then?" I asked anxiously.

"I think it is a lovely cupboard," he answered.

Now, isn't he beautiful?

## CHAPTER XXXV

CHRISTMAS is over, and I am very glad. It is a time that, unless it fills you with inordinate happiness, gives you a very considerable heart-ache. To make things as cheerless as possible, instead of getting my mail three days before I got it three days after Christmas Day.

Cynthia's mother invited me to go to them in Sussex, but I had to write and say I was sorry, but I was expected at the Middletons'. That was true as far as it went, but it didn't go very far. If I had written the exact truth I would have said, "Dear Mrs. Carter, I shall be delighted to come if my people send me a cheque for Christmas, and I get it in time." So I went to Chiswick instead.

We had a very quiet time. Agnes was very nice, and gave me half-a-dozen table knives and a flat-iron for a Christmas box. We had dinner in the middle of the day so that Peter might be able to eat more. I had to pretend I was too old to care about the sixpence that was imbedded in the middle of my pudding because he wanted it. My tragedy is that I cannot grow out of the pleasures that ought to have been put off with holland

pinafores and hair-ribbons. It is still the same terror to me to discover the thimble in my wedge, and the joy of finding myself the possessor of unexpected silver never loses its delicious freshness. After dinner everybody disappeared to rest. Every one except Peter, who dragged the bicycle he had found in his stocking that morning up to the empty room next mine and proceeded to teach himself how to ride. The end of the journey was evidently the corner of the room just where the head of my bed came, so I lay awake listening to the furious and frequent charges made at a long-suffering wall by an unskilled rider, and brooded over the futility of everything.

At five we met again for tea, and sat about aimlessly till half-past eight, when we finally gathered together to attack more creations evolved by the master mind of Agnes.

Next morning at breakfast no one seemed very cheerful. Peter was up-stairs sleeping it off. Agnes was all right, but George had got it in his toe, and George's maiden aunt was so aggressively, objectionably virtuous that I knew she must be feeling ashamed of herself. I don't wonder. I sat next to her at supper, and for a rigid disciplinarian who advocated the punishing of all things carnal and the advancement of all things spiritual, she was putting up a record.

She began by pecking at an oyster patty aloofly as if it were a concession she was willing to make

to the festive time of year. By the lobster *mayonnaise* her scruples seemed to be tottering, but when the chicken salad had been removed to make way for what was to follow she had simply thrown the reins on the horse's neck and was riding without any science whatever.

At the beginning of supper George called down the table in his usual hearty bellow—

"Aunt Susannah, what are you drinking?"

"A little soda-water, thank you," said Aunt Susannah, like the abstemious virgin that she is.

"Oh, come now," began George.

"No, George," she said decisively, "you know, I never take anything."

"I know," said George, with a wink at Agnes that fairly rattled down the table. "I know, but what about a little for the—health's sake, eh?"

I was cutting bread at the sideboard. Agnes turned to me with an empty plate.

"This happens every night," she said placidly in an undertone. "Put some more on this plate, Betty."

"That is the only thing that would induce me to take it," said Aunt Susannah. "If I thought that a little would not accentuate my unfortunate gout——"

"The only cure for it," said George emphatically. "What do you say, Hamilton?"

"Whisky is the sole friend that the gouty man has," replied Dr. Hamilton. "Will you allow me,

Miss Middleton?" He held the mouth of the decanter seductively over her glass.

"Well, as you advise it, just a little, a very little," said Aunt Susannah, looking chastely away while the spirit was being poured out.

"Will you say when?" asked Dr. Hamilton, pouring cautiously.

But Aunt Susannah Middleton did not say when. She was engaged in an absorbing conversation with her left-hand neighbour, and only awoke to the fact that Dr. Hamilton was still pouring when the whisky was well advanced in the tumbler.

Then she raised her hand. "Oh, stop, stop!" she cried. "Is not that too much? I should be afraid to take any but the smallest amount."

It was a sufficiently generous allowance to make a survivor of the three-bottle period stop to consider, but she filled it up with soda and took it like a man. When Peter came down to her end of the table and asked, with an unusually respectful expression upon his imperturbable face, for the medicine for father, I glanced at her out of the tail of my eye to see how she took it, but she was the only one who looked as if she hadn't heard it.

After breakfast Agnes busied herself about her domestic affairs, Aunt Susannah wrote letters in her room, and I, having tried the piano and found it hopelessly out of tune, went into the dining-room and played hymns on the American organ till lunch,



when we met again in an encounter over those foods we had not been able to consume the day before. In the afternoon George painted the tool-house, till Peter came down and knocked the paint pot over. Then I sat at the window and had a really interesting ten minutes while George said all he knew and most of what he felt. George used to hunt and shoot. Now he golfs. I leave the rest to you.

History went on repeating itself till Wednesday, when I went home again.

It was cold and dark when I got to Chelsea, and as I thought of going into the empty flat and being quite alone my heart failed me.

For all that my house was painted the colour I wanted it, and my stories are taken, and Lucy says I am a success, there didn't seem to be very much in things as I turned the key in the latch and looked into the unlighted hall. Then I found a heap of letters on the floor, and I flung down my parcels and turned on the light quickly so that I might devour them.

I opened the home ones first.

There was a long one from Maria with a photograph of her in a satin gown, all heavy sheeny folds, and a filmy scarf veiling her neck and arms. She looked lovelier than ever. She said, "Betty, dear, if you get tired of it come home," and I longed to go straight down to the docks and run back there and then. And she said she was sending a little

parcel with a watch in it, because she knew mine was not a very elaborate one. Roger wrote a dear letter too, and sent me a cheque that will prevent the rent-man calling for a little while. There were nice newsy ones from the Marrable girls, with a packet of cobwebby embroidered handkerchiefs, and another parcel of handkerchiefs from Aunt Julie, but nothing from Tony. I was surprised, because he writes pretty often.

Just then the porter came up with his arms full, and brought me the things that had come while I was away, so I stopped opening my letters to take them in.

The excitement of undoing the paper made me feel like a happy youngster again. It's awful, I know, to be such an easy prey to circumstances, but I never can help it.

I opened Maria's packet and found a beautiful little watch-bracelet. I clasped it on my wrist, picked up my skirts and waltzed round the room and back to the table again. Then I undid another, and some sweet satchet things fell out, silken bags with my initials worked on them by Cynthia. And a copy of *Omar*, bound in antelope skin, from the Oldest Man. That was nice of him.

There was a big parcel with a foreign stamp on it that I left till last. It was addressed in an unknown hand. When I took off the paper there was a plain wooden box inside. I opened it and pulled out from the shavings an exquisite Dresden

casket wreathed with garlands and supported with four little cupids.

Inside the ribbon that was tied round it was a note dated from Paris in the Youngest Man's very bad handwriting. He said—

"I wanted to call in and see you before Christmas, but I came off here at very short notice. I expect to be away in the Riviera about a fortnight. When I come back I shall call to inquire into the state of your health. *Marrons glacés* are not the best cure for dyspepsia, and I refuse to believe in you as a genius if your digestion is good. My respectful homage to the elephant."

I untied the ribbon, took out a sweet and ate it. Then I gathered up the rest of my letters and went to the couch where the elephant was lying covered with his counterpane.

"Wake up, my lovely," I said, lifting him on to my knee. "The man with the beautiful mouth has sent me a scruciating china-box wif sorrow inside it, and you, his respectful homage. And when he comes back, beloved, we'll put on our blue sash and our new silk stockings so that he shall know we aren't sorry to see him again. Now let us read the rest of our letters."

There was one from the Man That Uncle John Nursed, and it made me feel very thoughtful after I had read it. It is so odd that I should have made any one feel all that. It made me feel a bit ashamed.

The other was Cynthia's. She said—

"I was so sorry you couldn't come to us. Did you have a gay time at your cousin's? There were several dances down here, the biggest at Alton Towers, the Manleys' place. Beatrice Ferrars was there—the cousin of the K.C. man with the grey hair. She is awfully good-looking, about twenty-nine or thirty, and evidently as fascinating as she is beautiful. Some people say the reason why she has not married is because she wasn't well treated ever so many years ago by a Major Somebody. Others, that she is going to marry her cousin. She went up to London the day after the ball on her way to the Riviera. I liked her. Did you get the scent-bags all right? Mother gave me a pearl necklace.

"Yours,  
"CYNTHIA."

I sat very quiet and still for a long time, holding the elephant very close.

His dear little soft body pressed up tight to me made things not seem to hurt so much. After all I came home to work, and I must always remember that. I have been made a lot of lately, and I suppose it has made me collar-proud.

It will be January in a few days. Unless I work six hours a day for the next three months I shall have no excuse to idle through the summer. I put

him down gently on his own feather pillow and covered him over again with his little counterpane—it was one of the Youngest Man's handkerchiefs that he gave him one day when he came.

Then I went to bed.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

It's always the unexpected that happens. January has gone, February has gone, March is here, and I have not done one small thing to justify my existence.

I am quite alive to my shortcomings, but I am not sorry. There is that much of the philosopher about me. If I run up a hill to Providence with my eyes open, I think I am ready when settling day comes to pay it with my mouth closed.

Now I shall have to do with all my last summer frocks, or else make up something myself out of the glory-box, a thing I never do unless pushed to the final extremity. My art is more adapted for scene-painting than dressmaking. I am good enough at broad effects, but it's hooks and eyes and detail that keeps your clothes together. Only once did I ever make a blouse with its full complement of buttons, and then they were all exactly half-an-inch in the wrong direction. It gave me a lesson.

I did not yield myself up to idleness without a struggle. When the first of January came I laid in a stock of new writing-blocks, sharpened all my pencils afresh, and sat down resolutely to work.

But nothing happened. I sat hour after hour

and day after day with a mind as vacant and empty as the paper before me. All the while I was longing to be out and moving about, anything rather than sitting still, and when I couldn't stand it any longer I would get up and wander from room to room, then go back again desperately to the desk for another struggle.

At the end of a fortnight I gave it up. Out of that mountain of resolution came a wretched, miserable little mouse of three badly constructed pages that were eventually used by the new charwoman for lighting the sitting-room fire. It was a good end for them, but not a profitable one for me, and I couldn't help being very unhappy at the result.

Then when things were blackest, and I was sitting gloomily trying to think out another way of earning an honest living that was fairly easy and had not already been exploited by all the needy of the Universe, there was a ringing at the bell and a knocking at the door, and when I opened it Tony Marrable was on the mat!

For a moment or two I stood transfixed. Then I seized his hands and dragged him into the sitting-room. I stood him in the middle of the carpet, spinning round and round him and laughing out his name ecstatically. And finally, dropping into a heap on the couch, I howled my eyes out.

Poor Tony, he didn't know what to make of it at all. The beaming smile left his face and gave way to an abject terror.

"Betty," he gasped, panic-stricken, "Betty, for God's sake don't! What is the matter? Oh, what is the matter?" He plunged down on to his knees beside me and took my hand, wringing it frantically. "Are you ill or miserable, or what is it? For God's sake, Betty, don't cry; I can't bear it. Here, take mine." He dragged his handkerchief out of his pocket and thrust it into my hand. "There, that's better, pull yourself together like a Briton and tell me what in heaven's name is the matter?"

I dried my eyes, sniffed quietly for a while, and then laughed.

"Tony," I said, "it won't be often in your lifetime that you will be able to record the fact that your beauty has made a brave woman weep. Put it down now for fear you don't get the chance again. It was the unexpected sight of your loveliness on the door-mat when I thought you twelve thousand miles away that caused this unmaning. Get up off the floor and tell me how you managed to arrive in the nick of time to save me from suicide, and why?"

He heaved a sigh of relief, and swung his long lanky self up on to the couch beside me.

"When the day comes for your turfing," he said affectionately, "you will wriggle yourself through the interstices of your coffin to have a final jibe at the grave-diggers. But if you love me, Betty, never cry again without letting me know the reason first."



We sat and talked for two hours and three-quarters and still had said nothing—at least nothing compared with what there was left to say. And Tony went, promising to come next day the minute he had finished breakfast.

Then I, Elizabeth Beresford, with a reputation to make and money to earn, hastily locked up all traces of work in the drawers of the writing-desk, and putting on my best hat and a new pair of gloves, sallied out with Tony to find amusement. And we searched so industriously and so unceasingly that I, even with *my* capacity and rapacity for enjoyment, felt at the end of five weeks it was good and pleasant to go back to the tasks locked up in the bureau, and that a course of frugality served up by the charwoman would not do me any lasting injury.

For five weeks Tony never let the ball stop spinning. He gave luncheon parties and tea parties and dinner parties and theatre parties, and I went to them all. At last he tore himself away; he had come over to look after property left to them in Ireland, but London was so entrancing to him that it was only by sheer will he could get away from it. But I explained to him it would be ever so much better later on, and if he didn't go before things *began* to be nice, he would have to go when they *were*. He went, ruefully, but he went. And I am working feverishly that I may lay up a store of unapproachable idleness for the summer.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

IN the winter I hanker excessively after the flesh-pots of the town.

I want silk linings to all my frocks and to be able to give them away the minute I get tired of them.

I want motor-cars and carriages, and statuesque footmen holding expensive rugs at the door of prohibitive *maisons* in Bond Street, and silk stockings, and furs, and opera-boxes, and Turkey carpets and embroidered sheets, and real lace and china, and sofas like eiderdown houses and trips to India, and electric light baths and people to massage me, and—millions of things.

But to-day the old chestnut tree that grows outside the window has made me change my mind, and I want the money these things would cost, to live a simple life. The buds on the tips of that old stark, black-looking skeleton give a sort of synopsis of what is going to happen somewhere within the next four months—and I feel I must be there when it does.

So I am again wanting a country house, and my collect for this day and many days to come will be

the same, which begins "Oh, Lord, blind the eyes——"

It shall not be all oak panelling and old masters, this place that is going to be mine when the perversion of my judges is successfully encompassed. It will only be a little white place with a red-tiled porch, leaded windows, and a thatched roof; but the roof shall never leak and the chimneys shall never smoke, neither shall there be any draughts there.

And instead of tapestries and gilding I will have sweet rose-patterned chintzes and fresh white paint, something that can take its tubbing bravely whenever the need arises. Muslins that in their hours of ease shall draw fragrance from lavender strewn in the presses where they lie. And even though it's bad for me, I will have honey and clotted cream every morning on the table for breakfast.

I will grow my own vegetables, and flout the mythical greengrocer who never calls. Peas, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, lettuces, and—because I shall then be a personage and able to indulge openly in pleasures that, before arriving, are called vulgarities, and after, eccentricities—spring onions in abundance.

There shall be great shady trees wearing feathery green petticoats, and spreading out kind, sheltering arms between you and the sun, yet not crowding their branches so thickly that you cannot see how gloriously blue the sky is. And the garden shall

have its beds outlined with clipped borders of sweet spicy thyme, while inside there will be rows of tall hollyhocks and foxgloves, clumps of violets and velvet-faced polyanthus and tender little pansies; oh! and bushes of golden laburnum and plummy lilac, and geraniums in pots on the casement ledges, and roses, thousands of roses, not the new-fangled kind, but old-fashioned, sedate ones. Great big stiff cabbage ones, shy moss ones, the bride with her face of snow and a lovely pink blush hidden in her heart, the crimson damask heavy and sweet and fragrant, and the seven sisters, thornless and virgin, all keeping house so purely and peacefully on one stem.

And where the thyme does not grow I will have masses of many-coloured stocks, purple and white and mauve and pink; and herds of sweet clove-scented picotees swinging out of their pale bluey-green beds like a flock of butterflies; waxen hyacinths and deep, rich glowing wall flowers, and all the most beautiful blossoms that were ever evolved by a master-mind to awaken man to the knowledge of his power.

And I will walk out among these darlings with the dew lying over them like a gauzy network of diamonds, and watch them turning their faces to the sun, yielding up their wonders at the touch of his kiss, and making the whole world around a paradise by reason of their joyous giving.

I suppose really it would be a horticultural im-

possibility that they should all be growing and blowing at the same time, but it does not matter. There would be quite enough with half of them, to make you feel a king and a child and a conqueror and a god and a delirious idiot all rolled into one.

I am not satisfied when I think that another summer is coming round, and I am still no nearer success than I was twelve months ago. And when success means those dear things I want so badly I am not only dissatisfied but angry at the loss of time in accomplishing my desires.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

I DON'T think I have ever known what work really meant till this last two months. I don't mean that I have never worked as hard, but I mean I have never got from it before what it has given me this time.

We impecunious women almost always begin by attacking it in the same spirit. We either hate it, and shirk it by taking the first husband that offers himself, or else we accept it stoically as the inevitable and put the best face on it possible.

But we don't like it. I suppose that is natural enough. The majority of women in our class do not work. And when you see those of your own world getting easily what you have to fight for you may not grumble, but you don't call yourself singularly blessed. If you are an ordinary, healthy kind of creature, who cannot find reason enough or courage enough to take the matter into your own hands and ring down the curtain definitely, you look about for the best way of carrying things on and prepare to settle down to it philosophically or unphilosophically according to the composition of you.

That's what I did. What Marie got from Aunt

Julie by her beauty and extreme amiability and tact, inasmuch as she made herself so necessary that Aunt Julie could not do without her, I wrested from Fate by the teaching of infants.

Heavens, what a martyrdom! And how perilously near being corpses those infants sometimes got!

I can see them now sitting in a row before me, their pure eyes solemnly fixed in a gaze so cherubic and bland that you inwardly wept to think of such innocence having to be destroyed.

Again I protest against the falsity of the statement that eyes are the windows of the soul. Those seven babes were seven serpents of subtlety and seven devils of torment. They set snares for my simplicity and digged pits for my ignorance. They were not content to propitiate with offerings as an ordinary grown-up child will do. That method they discovered at the outset to be ineffective, and quickly abandoned it for another that would bring me to my senses without delay.

It is the custom of every child to endeavour to protect itself from the wrath to come by presenting flowers to the particular person who has the dealing out of the thunderbolts. At the same time the offering is supposed to purchase a certain amount of freedom of conduct, and the one who has paid the tribute is inclined to feel himself immune from criticism and to act upon that belief.

It is a hoary, time-honoured trick, and I recog-

nized it as my own directly I saw it again. And I met it in exactly the same spirit as my tutors had met it, not allowing it in any way to warp my judgment.

That was as disappointing to the seven as it had been to me, but where I had seen the futility of it, and had given up the struggle, they refined it and went on. The flowers were brought, but not tendered. They were clasped in hot tenacious little hands until, for the sake of the regulations, I had to order them to be put away. Then began a pantomime. The one who carried the flowers, with the air of a submissive but unconquered sovereign, rose and mutely, tenderly laid them beneath the form. The eyes of the six were glued upon her full of approval and understanding. To them she turned and said voicelessly, but with nods and becks and masonic signs, "She is angry because they have not been given her, and is persecuting me therefore. But she shall not have them till she has proved herself worthy. I will keep them till the time of her authority is ended, and not then shall they be hers unless she has bought her right to them." And the six answered, "It is well. Let us break her spirit." Then, the matter ended, they crossed their legs, ducked their heads behind their slates, and worked with a conscious absorption, squinting at me every now and then over the wooden rims to see how I was taking it.

How I got through those years I don't know.



In the summer, through the long blazing days, the children, made fractious by the heat, droned out their lessons hour after hour till release came. The same virtue rewarded by the same praise, the same wickedness punished by the same discipline, the same fat fly knocking itself against the window-pane. In the winter there was never a day that some child hadn't a cold in its head. Those who were without handkerchiefs didn't use them, those who possessed them never stopped using them. Under such conditions I read the *Idylls of the King* from beginning to end, thieving the half-hours by giving the children slatefuls of writing to do, copies on one side and sums on the other. Then once in a weekly paper I came across something written by a girl I knew. It was a trifling experience that had happened to her, and not very well done. It set me thinking. Perhaps I might turn mine to some account. I wrote to Dulce. Dulce the misnamed, the limb of Satan; Dulce, who was born into the world for the castigating and chastening of her fellow-men; Dulce the abandoned, Dulce the absorbingly interesting.

I sent it to a newspaper, enclosing stamped envelope for its return. Then I went to the Marra-bles' to dinner and stayed the night. The MS. was home again before I was. I shut it up in my desk, wondering how I could be such a senseless idiot as to imagine any one would look at it. A month later I saw another paper by the same girl

with less to justify it than the last. I took Dulce out and sent her again. She came back, after a longer absence, with the same printed regrets, the only difference between the two journeys being that one man had dismissed her less promptly than the other.

There was still a third asylum for her. I doggedly put her into a new envelope, enclosed a short note to the editor saying I would call for his decision in a week's time, and waited.

At the end of the week I went without any upliftings or hopes to get the MS. I presented myself and inquired for it. It was in type, and would be out the following week. Had I any more?

Sometimes I have most entrancing dreams. I am flying through space touching nothing, yet full of confidence and fearing no fall. It was in that state I left the office and found my way home. There was no pavement under my feet, my body had no weight, and I was not conscious of any action. I was simply being propelled by some joyous invigorating power.

That was the beginning of the knowledge that work might also be pleasure. I was not the dull leaden pipe through which a force was to be conveyed. I was the force itself.

But being a woman, that can not always satisfy. While the flush of success is upon me I expand in the warmth of it. But when I see Maria beautiful as a woman should be, surrounded, enveloped and

shielded by the love of a dependable worshipping man, I feel there is nothing in being a woman unless you can be it utterly. And even if you become famous and get all that fame has to give, the whole of it wouldn't be worth the simple knowledge that one person needed you and you him. It's a great thing to be a queen in your own right, with a shining crown and people to clap their hands at your entry—if you want it.

But there isn't much in it if you would rather be nobody, with an ordinary commonplace creature who stroked your head when it ached, and would be lost without you if his little finger happened to get ill. It's the small things in life that matter so much.

Perhaps if I had been like Maria I should have said yes to the Man That Uncle John Nursed and been a very decent wife to him, but I learnt then, much as I wanted all he offered, I would rather go on being lonely than take all and give nothing. It would make a life just as empty of joy as giving all and getting nothing.

It made the value of work appeal to me. It was a way of gaining freedom. If I were in time able to keep myself, I at least would not need to marry a man in self-defence. That seemed a step in the right direction and an advancement in morality. I went on, working sometimes with pleasure, sometimes as a duty, sometimes not at all. Then it came that I needed comfort, and I turned to it as

something that would help me, something that would make me not think of things that hurt. And although I am not able to forget altogether it gives me a refuge, and in these last two months I have grown to feel the joy of work simply for its own sake, the pride of creation, the wonder of having made something that did not exist before.

It seems to me that it would be so much better if all women were brought up not necessarily to be independent, but to be *able* to be independent. As it is there are not enough men numerically to go round, and even those who could be distributed are not all worth distributing. If there were a reliable man for every woman, well and good; let us all be housewives and make a fine art of our profession. But there is not, and though it may be a regrettable truth that spinning is an almost extinct art among gentlewomen, yet these same gentlewomen do not sit down and die of declines as frequently as they used, nor are they content to be put aside and called old maids at twenty-five without entering a fairly vigorous protest.

There is a lot to be said in favour of our emancipation, even though extremists go near wrecking the cause by dressing it in uncomely petticoats and shouting its importance in unpleasant tones. When I have more time, more money, and less shyness on platforms, I shall be an avowed woman's righter, but will take care that I am well coiffed and my hat suits me before I open my mouth in public.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

IT is the last week in June, and I am about to take a fortnight's pure, untrammelled holiday, serene in the knowledge that three months' dogged attention to duty has earned me the unquestionable right to loaf.

I let the flat, retired to a quiet spot in the country, and allowed nothing to tempt me. When I had nearly finished, a letter came from The Oldest Man. He said—

“DEAR PRINCESS,

“When the scheme of creation was being mapped out, a certain section of alleged representatives of humanity were sub-scheduled ‘for experimental purposes.’

“On these, since the beginning of things, every conceivable form of annoyance was practised, not out of a sheer spirit of devilry on the part of the Creator, but simply in order to see how far it was possible to go without absolutely separating the life-fluid from the body.

“It's really the same as what is done on a smaller

scale in Gower Street, where terriers and cats are tied down and cut to pieces to see how they look inside.

"Now this is all very beautiful, but I put it to you who know everything—Why should I be one of the experimentees?

"I would much rather grow roses, and keep a sun-dial clean in the middle of an old garden. Here I am to some extent an industrious workman, and until a few years ago able-bodied. Would it not be much better-bred on the part of Providence to be nice to me? As it is I am well on my way to incipient lunacy.

"I fancy I might rally a little if you came up to town and comforted me. Have you not yet finished the Book? Incidentally my uncle died with great *éclat* the other day.

"Yours,

"W. M. D."

"There are those who might say that I am no longer on my way towards incipient lunacy."

It was rather a temptation. Within sight of the end, I was beginning to be desperately tired of the book, and it would be very refreshing to go up for a day or two, see familiar faces, and get something decent to eat. The Youngest Man had also written to ask when I was coming back to life again, and Cynthia's many letters spoke of delirious joys I

was prodigally sacrificing. Just two or three little days, and then back to it with renewed vigour.

For a wonder experience taught me. I knew if I promised myself two or three days I would take a week. And a week in town would mean two more in the country, picking up the loose ends and knitting them together again. I turned my back resolutely and stuck to it.

But it seemed as if, out of pure cussedness, nothing would come. I sat day after day with the paper before me trying to bite thoughts out of the end of my pencil. Some days I would get nothing; others perhaps twenty lines would be the result of six hours' dogged persistence. But the lines went on accumulating, and at last I knew that the way I had walked in darkness was really the road home. Suddenly the light broke and I was standing with my hand upon the latch. It is very odd, that. You go on almost stupidly, thinking you are working to no purpose and to no end, and without warning the fog lifts, and you see that things have all the while been shaping themselves.

As I wrote the last word of the last chapter and made the final stroke underneath, a wonderful feeling came over me. It was as if I had suddenly but calmly and quietly established my indisputable right to a foothold upon the Universe. I had come into my own, and whatever else I might lose later, that could never be taken away. I had made something as well as I knew how. I had painted the thing as

I saw it, and even if it were a poor view it was an honest one, and not clipped or falsified for the sake of getting a market. The knowledge of that would increase the joy of it as a success, and soften the disappointment of it as a failure.

I was very, very happy.

Then I stuffed everything into my trunk and raced up to London. It was nice to get back. Although I love the country so, I could not do without the town. I was born in it, and will always hark back to the roar of the traffic and the smell of the pavements.

It is cruel if you are tied to it year in and year out, but it does call to the cockney, and I am a cockney of the colonies. I feel the tremendousness of its vitality, the fascination of its activity. I suppose it really is that I love life so that I need every phase of it, for after all one side is just as necessary as the other.

I took the book to be typed, went and saw the flat which was vacant again, and lunched with Tony, who had just come back from Ireland.

The people I was going to stay with are relatives of his, and it was through him I knew them. I told him all about the book; we arranged to go down together to the Newtons' that day week, and then I went home to Agnes' to rummage among the silks and laces in my glory box, and reorganize my wardrobe.



## CHAPTER XL

TONY and I met at Paddington. He had gone a few days earlier to Taplow, but came up in his nice thoughtful way so that I might have some one to look after me.

Of course I only caught the train by the skin of my teeth, and poor Tony had to rush round frantically to get everything in as the whistle was blowing, but he is a dear, sweet-tempered thing, and couldn't be angry if he tried.

"Your little peculiarities still cling to you, I see," he said, flinging himself into a corner of the carriage and mopping his brow, while the train slipped away from the platform.

"You mean about catching trains?"

He nodded. "Well, yes, I suppose you're within your rights in calling it that, but only just. You do cut it a bit fine, you know, Betty. At home, if you didn't miss it you only just got it by hanging on to the guard's van and transferring at the next station."

"In the days of my obscurity," I said, "that was counted unto me as a vice, but when I become famous, it, along with my passion for spring onions,

will be paragraphed in every society paper to my unquenchable glory. No genuine success is ever normal. If he can keep his appointments up to time, he in all probability doesn't wash himself, and if he both washes himself and keeps his appointments, he turns up in such clothes that you wish he hadn't come at all. Don't grumble, Tony. Who is at the Newtons'?"

"There's a Mrs. Carlton Smyth and her daughter Muriel," said Tony, enumerating, "a pretty little girl with nothing much to say for herself; Captain and Mrs. Carruthers, Miss Beatrice Ferrars, a ripper, a chap called Vereker, an honourable with pots of money, who is beloved of Mamma Carlton Smyth for Miss Muriel's sake, and who has eyes for no one but Miss Ferrars, and yourself, and myself. Miss Ferrars' cousin, a man, is coming down later in the week."

I think, if I had known, I would have refused the invitation. But I had not seen the Youngest Man for some weeks. He had called twice, but each time I was out, and although it hurt not to see him, I did not write because it would have hurt more to have had him near me. In my heart I felt a fierce resentment of this woman who seemed to have so much. Money, beauty, a tremendous power of attraction, and—well, it couldn't be helped now. I was nearly there and must go through with it. But that I should have to sit by and see him caring for her!—she who seemed to

have so many lovers. I, who only wanted one, I hated her.

Tony's voice awoke me.

"You are very quiet all at once, Betty. What's the matter?"

I laughed. "I will tell you the reason. There are at least two acknowledged beauties in the party. You know how I dislike a woman who reminds every one of my imperfections."

"Don't you worry," he said comfortingly. "You may not be beautiful, but I'll back you to hold your own with any woman that is, and score well in the end." Tony is very loyal, even though a love of truth may prevent him saying the things one wants him to.

There was a dog-cart at the station. We got into it and drove to the house. It is an old rambling place covered with ivy, and lying right along the river just outside the lock.

A maid took me to my room, and when I had washed my hands and readjusted my curls, I went down into the hall, where Tony was waiting for me.

"You don't dawdle before your looking-glass," he said approvingly. "Let us find them; they're at tea on the lawn."

We walked out through the French windows of the drawing-room to a shady corner of the garden, where a group of people were gathered about the tea-table. Mrs. Newton rose and came towards

us. She was a big, placid-looking woman of forty, who was very happy herself and seemed to want every one else to be the same.

"Well, Betty, dear," she said, kissing me heartily on both cheeks, "I *am* glad to see you. Has Tony looked after you well? Come and sit down beside me while Potter brings some fresh tea, and tell me all the clever things you have been doing."

"This is a young person who is going to be famous some day," she went on, introducing me all round. "She is writing a book, and unless you are very good and deferential to her she'll put you all into it, won't you, dear?"

"I can't very well this time," I said, "because it's already finished. But if you will promise to be very bad, I could do another and give you one all to yourselves. Mrs. Newton, I don't think it's cricket to begin by setting every one against me."

She smiled placidly and patted my hand. Muriel Carlton Smyth looked at me inquisitively, and there was a slight hostility in Mrs. Carlton Smyth's face, and a protesting jingle among her bangles, as she turned to her daughter.

"Muriel, darling, move your chair out of the sun. I am so afraid of her freckling," she said in a voice that was an appeal to every one to look for the improbability.

We all looked. There was not a trace or a shadow of a blemish upon the dazzling freshness of Miss Carlton Smyth's skin.

"There is no need to worry," said Mrs. Newton in her kindly, sincere way. "Muriel is beautifully fair, and it is a fairness that doesn't freckle."

"Muriel is lovely," murmured Mrs. Carruthers sentimentally, "she is like a flower," and Captain Carruthers, although he said nothing, looked genuine and open admiration, as indeed he might, for her colouring was very exquisite.

Mrs. Carlton Smyth sighed contentedly. She had got the limelight back to her darling, and was satisfied. Tony looked over at me with an innocent face, but there was a glance tucked away in the corner of his eye that showed he missed very little. He is more by way of being one of the children of this world than a child of light when it comes to being wise in his generation.

They went on talking while Tony and I were having our tea, and I had a good look at them. Besides Mrs. Newton and Tony and me there were only Captain and Mrs. Carruthers, and Mrs. Carlton Smyth and Muriel. Captain Carruthers looked rather nice, a well-knit man with a close-cut straw-coloured moustache and cold blue eyes that lit up with a rather boyish amusement as he talked. His wife, a dainty little Dresden figure, with dark hair that curled babyishly at her neck, sat in her chair as if it were a throne, and looked down upon things around with the supreme air of an assured but languid little queen.

Her beauty in its own way was so indisputable

that she could afford to praise the rosebud freshness of Muriel Carlton Smyth without stint. Mrs. Carlton Smith, I should say, was herself and the late Mr. Carlton Smyth as well. She was a striking looking dark woman, with a determined mouth, who dressed beautifully, and accentuated the hardness of her face by the style in which she did her hair. She wore it piled very high on top of her head and in a close fringe straight across her brow. She was very gracious to Tony. He was an eminently presentable boy, and his fortune would be quite large enough to comfort any mother for the loss of a greater one.

We sat talking under the trees as the shadows lengthened over the smooth green lawns. It was so calm and peaceful that the quietness was like something that took you up in its arms and nursed you.

There were voices on the tow-path on the other side of the hedge. The little gate into the garden opened, and a girl and a man came slowly across the grass towards us. It was Mr. Vereker and Miss Ferrars.

Somehow the resentment and bitterness died down in my heart as I looked into her face. She had the same clear, honest eyes, the same steadfast expression that had made the Youngest Man dear to me before I cared in any other way. Whatever battle she fought I felt would be fought fair, and the odds were too much on her side for me even to

dream of a conflict. Besides that, I don't think I could fight for a man no matter how I cared. The man I want must know that he wants me, not allow himself to be wrangled for and carried off by whichever competitor happens to be the stronger. I could love a man knowing he was weak—the mother that is in most of us would see to that. I might, having once possessed him, struggle and strive and strain to hold him. But in the first place he would have to come of his own accord, and not be cajoled or dragged to the banquet.

And as I looked at her I knew that the lovers this woman had would be hers in her own right, and not angled for or stolen from other women.

She came forward with her hand outstretched and a smile of recognition in her eyes as Mrs. Newton introduced us.

"Why, you must be the Miss Beresford my cousin Christian knows," she said. "I have been quite curious to meet you, because he once said we were rather the same sort of people, and ever since then I have wanted to see what I am really like." She turned to Mrs. Newton with a charming impulsive gesture. "Isn't it nice, Lucy? Kit and Miss Beresford know one another quite well."

Mrs. Newton looked surprised and pleased.

"I am glad of that," she said to me. "We are expecting him here soon."

"Tony told me so in the train," I answered. "It will be nice to meet him again."

Then the conversation became general once more, and we all sat talking till it was time to go and dress.

At dinner it was apparent to me what a favourite Beatrice Ferrars was with both Mrs. Newton and her husband.

Mr. Newton would break off in the middle of a conversation every now and then and say, "What do you think, Trix?" as if he wanted to draw her into the argument. And I noticed that what she said was generally worth something. Sometimes it was only a jesting retort, but never a meaningless one. She was almost beautiful, with lots of wavy brown hair, a straight nose, and a rather large but beautifully-curved mouth, and her spirits seemed to be unbounded. But sometimes when she was silent I noticed a sad look creep unconsciously over her face, and I wondered if it were a sadness that was born in it like Maria's, or if she who seemed so splendid and triumphant had really known what it was to sorrow for anything.

After dinner, when they were settling who should play bridge and who wouldn't, she came over and sat beside me on the couch.

"I am coming to talk to you," she said, "if I may."

I moved up to make room for her.

"Please do," I said; "but aren't you a bridge player?"

"As a matter of fact I love it," she said, "but



just at present I am busy over a task that is to establish my right to be called a person who can."

"Who can what?" I asked.

"Who can work, who can persevere, who can finish." She pulled out a piece of canvas with a tangle of wool and silks. "I am proving it by making a waistcoat for Kit, because he says that although I am very good for short distances I have no staying power, and my vanity is wounded. If you ever start on a waistcoat you know in a very short time what your weaknesses are. Have you ever made one?" She was working industriously.

"Once," I said. "It was to be a secret present for Tony, but he's never had it yet, because when I had just about finished the second half I found I had done both pieces for the same side, and it was such a blow that I hadn't the strength to begin all over again."

She threw back her head and laughed.

"There is nothing like a common sorrow for drawing people together," she said. "I feel that already I have known you a lifetime, for this is also my third side."

"Beatrice, won't you really take a hand?" called Mrs. Newton from the bridge-table, and Mr. Vereker looked over appealingly, but Beatrice shook her head.

"No, thank you," she said, "I must get on with my work, and Miss Beresford and I are busy discovering ourselves."

Secretly I think she refused because of Mr. Vereker. Tony said he simply shadowed her, and although she seemed to like him, it was only in a friendly sort of way that did not make her indifferent to the feelings of Mrs. Carlton Smyth and Muriel. But I could see, by the expressions of both mother and daughter, that they looked upon her as a person who laid herself out for conquest and deliberately set her plans for the ensnaring of her victims. If they had only the sense to look dispassionately—and get a wrinkle—they might have seen that she did it really through not caring at all.

## CHAPTER XLI

It was a hot afternoon about a week after I arrived. Mr. Newton and Captain Carruthers were out golfing. Tony had gone by himself in the canoe to Maidenhead, and Mrs. Carlton Smyth, Muriel, Mrs. Carruthers and I were sitting in the cool drawing-room that overlooked the garden, waiting for tea.

In the shade of the trees at the far end of the lawn Beatrice Ferrars was lying in a gay-tasselled hammock, while beside her Mr. Vereker stood alternately digging and mopping his brow.

Mrs. Carlton Smyth looked like Queen Elizabeth on one of her bad days. Her mouth was nipped together tightly, and thunder sat on her brow. Mrs. Newton being out of the room, she seized the opportunity, during the temporary absence of her hostess, of saying candidly and frankly what she thought of the girl in the hammock.

In extenuation let it be said that her own daughter Muriel, who should have been helping the Honourable Richard Vereker, with twenty thousand a year of his own, to dig, was sitting with one eye upon the *Lady's Pictorial* and the other on that

particular part of the landscape that was causing the maternal blood to boil.

But it was only chance on one side and devotion on the other that had produced the existing state of affairs. Miss Ferrars and I had been sitting together talking quietly when Mr. Vereker sauntered across the lawn and announced his intention of taking exercise. He had taken off his coat, and seized upon a spade that stood propped up against a tree. He began by doing it because it would give him the excuse to stay near her. Then I think he got interested in it for its own sake. But there was no earthly reason why she should turn herself out of a comfortable hammock and go somewhere she didn't want to simply because he preferred working near her to dallying beside Muriel.

"Beatrice Ferrars is an incorrigible coquette, and that boy is a silly young fool," said Mrs. Carlton Smyth in an outraged voice. "I wonder Lucy has patience with her."

Pretty Mrs. Carruthers, whose reputation as a peace-destroying though blameless matron was being seriously menaced, felt that to say a few words would relieve her own overcharged heart.

"Poor girl," she said compassionately, "she was treated very badly about eight or nine years ago, wasn't she? I dare say now that her marriageable years are numbered she feels she must make the most of them." Mrs. Carruthers was married at eighteen, and saw that you didn't forget it.

"I should think she could have married pretty often since then," I said. "She is very good-looking, and seems to be tremendously popular." I knew I wasn't exactly throwing oil on the troubled waters, but it wouldn't have been fair to do it.

Mrs. Carlton Smyth shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"It is easy enough to be in the front if you insist upon putting yourself there. I should be sorry for a daughter of mine to make herself conspicuous in the same way."

I glanced at Muriel Carlton Smyth. She was beginning to enjoy herself. It must be comforting to have a mamma who calls other people's successes vulgarities and your failures innate delicacy.

"It was Captain Ashburton she was engaged to, wasn't it?" asked Mrs. Carruthers. "I remember hearing my mother speak of it, but I was only a school-girl at the time."

"Yes, he was Captain then; it must have been nine years ago. He is Colonel now."

"What was it that really happened?" asked Mrs. Carruthers again, and Muriel laid down her paper and fixed an interested eye upon her mother.

"She met him at the Newtons'. They were both staying in the house together. A little while after they were engaged he was ordered out to India. While he was there the usual thing happened. Some woman—married, of course—tied him to her chariot-wheels so successfully that he lost his appe-

tite for youthful simplicity and wrote to tell Miss Beatrice of the change, and to give her the satisfaction of breaking it off."

Mrs. Carruthers sighed sympathetically. "Poor thing, it was very sad for her. Do you think she has any real chance with Dick Vereker?"

"She has this much in her favour," said Mrs. Carlton Smyth grimly, "she is quite four years his senior. That always seems to tell with a very young man."

"He is twenty-five," said Muriel, reckoning. "Then she must be twenty-nine," and she turned up her nose.

Beatrice came in through the French windows fanning herself with her hat. "It is very hot in the sun," she said, sinking down into a big chintz-covered chair. "And who is twenty-nine? May I know?"

No real baby ever looked so young or as innocent as Mrs. Carruthers did at that moment. She absolutely cooed.

"How funny that you should come in just as we were talking of you."

Beatrice stopped fanning herself and sat up straight.

"Do I look twenty-nine?" she asked slowly.

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Carruthers.

"Yes," said Mrs. Carlton Smyth.

"Yes, quite," said Muriel, lashed into exasperation by the sight of the Honourable Richard, who

had left off digging and was lying on his back in the hammock, with his hat tilted over his eyes, manifesting no immediate desire to join the party in the drawing-room.

There was every excuse, not so much in what was said, but the way in which it was said, for Miss Beatrice Ferrars to be honestly hurt. It was not her fault that Richard Vereker preferred her to any one else. I had often seen her do little kind things to bring Muriel forward, drawing her into the conversation and taking her on the river, when Mr. Vereker had evidently intended that there should only be one in the punt beside himself. It might be quite true that she didn't want a monopoly of him, but it was also true that Muriel was not in herself a very companionable person, and might be relied upon to be a jarring note in any party that was a small one. She was too young to have much to talk about, and too self-centred to be interested in anything that did not concern her personally.

For one moment Beatrice dropped her eyes, but when she looked up again her face was perfectly serene.

She got up, walked lazily to a long glass and studied herself carefully. Then she went back to her chair as if quite satisfied.

"At last I have had justice done me," she said, "and more than justice. I shall be thirty-one to-morrow."

The door opened and Mrs. Newton came in, fol-

lowed by the maid with the tea-tray. She looked round the room. "We are a very small party," she said. "Where are Tony and Mr. Vereker?"

"Tony took the canoe to Maidenhead after lunch," I volunteered. "He ought to be in soon."

"And Mr. Vereker, did he go too?"

Beatrice turned from the tea-table and pointed out of the window.

"He has been digging up your garden," she said. "He seems to be under the impression that he will get that oak out before dinner, and asked if he might have his tea in the hammock so that he needn't waste time by stopping to wash his hands."

To say that Mrs. Carlton Smyth snorted was to understate a simple, homely fact.

"He is suddenly and unusually industrious," she said shortly.

"I think he must have got a fright about his figure," replied Beatrice calmly. Then she turned to Mrs. Newton. "Lucy, it is my thirty-first birthday to-morrow. May I have a cake with my name on it?"

"Yes, dear, if you like."

"And may I choose what we have for dinner?"

"Beatrice, will you never grow up?"

"But may I?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I want stuffed turkey trimmed with sausages and a double lot of bread sauce." She carefully furnished the plate of the spurious gar-



dener and went on. "All my life I have never been able to get enough bread sauce. And little new potatoes and——"

Mrs. Newton put her fingers in her ears. "If you don't go away with that tea at once and stop talking nonsense you shall have dry bread up in your room."

Beatrice picked up the cup and saucer and plate and went out. "I will take this and come back to discuss it with you," she said.

"It is rather absurd of a person of her age to put on those youthful airs," said Mrs. Carlton Smyth, helping herself to sugar.

Mrs. Newton looked out affectionately across the garden. "That is the beauty of Beatrice," she said. "She never puts on anything. It is as natural for her to say and do the things she does as it is for me to feel the heat or to love Tom. And she will be just the same in forty years if she lives, and in her it won't seem odd even then. She has an eternal freshness that nothing seems to wither."

Here a maid entered, bringing a telegram.

Mrs. Newton opened it. She gave an exclamation of surprise.

"It is from Colonel Ashburton. He is back from India, and is motoring down to-night for dinner." Then she looked troubled, and glanced involuntarily out of the window again. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she didn't notice the faces of the others in the room. But I did.

## CHAPTER XLII

I THINK it must be that Miss Ferrars cares more for the Youngest Man than for any one.

The night that Colonel Ashburton arrived she came into the room and greeted him quite simply, and without a trace of embarrassment, even though she must have known that the eyes of every one were secretly upon her.

Of course you don't, unless you are very young or have very little control, carry your heart in your face when you know that people are on the alert for you to betray yourself, but there are moments when the mask—if it is a mask—drops ever so slightly, and I, who was longing to see it fall, would have known before any one else if it had. It was not vicious curiosity that made me watch every expression of her face, and listen for the shades in her voice when she spoke to or of Colonel Ashburton. It was as if I were waiting for a reprieve that only she could give.

As for him, he did not keep his secret so well. I was sitting in a chair behind the piano, a little way away from the others, and when she walked in with the lazy grace that always seems so at variance with the vivacity of her speech, and stopped before him holding out her hand, speaking

as if they might have been friends who had only parted yesterday, I noticed a nervous movement of his hand and a momentary rigidity in his manner. He was himself again very quickly, but all the way he was not so unconscious of her presence as she was of his. She looked very handsome, and to my mind was easily before any woman in the room. She wore a soft trailly gown of white crêpe, a masterpiece of complicated simplicity, and her hair was dressed low on her neck. She didn't have any jewels except a large emerald slung on a slender chain round her throat, but the intensity of its colour made her skin look like fine ivory.

The next day the Youngest Man came. He was just his dear honest self, and seemed unfeignedly glad to see me, but although I laughed and jested with him as usual, I went off on the river with Tony as soon as I could, because somehow now that he was here I felt I must shut my eyes and put my fingers in my ears, and run away before I saw what I was so afraid to see. I don't wonder at his caring for her, because she is so splendid-looking, and such a good companion as well, and I don't see how she could really care for any one but the Youngest Man anyway. But it makes me feel as if I were a little child that had hurt itself, and wanted its mother very badly, but knew it hadn't got one.

And—I suppose because we were young together—Tony gets the nearest to being the mother I want.

## CHAPTER XLIII

"YOU'RE very quiet," said Tony; "what are you thinking of?" We were in a backwater, with the punt tied up to a stump on the bank. Tony was lying beside me, with his hat pulled over his face and his knees up. The elephant was leaning over the side.

"I'm betendin'," I answered, without moving my eyes from the jagged edge of the bank.

"What's the game?" he asked lazily.

"It's no use telling you, you're asleep."

"No, I'm not."

"You wouldn't be interested."

"Yes, I would."

"Well, you oughtn't to be. You're too old."

"What about you? You're six months older," returned Tony cheerfully.

"That's different. I'm a woman, and it's our business to pretend."

"Never mind," he said coaxingly. "Tell me like a dear, Betty. I remember yours always used to be the best of the lot when we were little. I'd like to do it again."

"Well, ordinary people would think this was a

silly little backwater of an English river, wouldn't they?"

"It's a mistake that is commonly made," asserted Tony.

"I know. But they're quite wrong. Shall I tell you what it is?" I lowered my voice to a whisper.

"What?" he asked breathlessly.

"It's the Nile." A rat came out of one of the holes in the bank and scurried into the water. "Hist! did you see that hippopotamus rush out of its cave and plunge into the papyrus beds?"

"I don't want to carp," said Tony doubtfully, "but the banks of the Nile are flat, and are you quite sure that papyruses have beds?"

"The banks of my Nile are not flat as you can see for yourself, and my papyruses *have* beds, very comfortable beds, and roomy enough to accommodate any hippopotamus that may be feeling like it. Don't interrupt unless you are going to help."

"Sorry," he said, straightening out his legs and crossing his feet comfortably. "Go on."

"Along those banks I am walking with my maidens."

"Who are you?"

"I am Pharaoh's daughter, all glorious within, and about the size of a wax vesta."

"Make it a hair-pin," he begged, "it's easier to see. And what am I?"

"You are not there."

"Oh, yes I am, though."

"I'm sorry, but you can't be."

"Why not?"

"Because she is going to bathe."

"Make me an Egyptian gentleman who is sweet on her, and is always following her about."

"You would be no gentleman if you followed her to the baths. I'm really very sorry, but there is no place for you."

"Then the story doesn't go on," said Tony firmly.

"Don't be so childish," I said. "You can see it is not my fault."

"Make a place for me, if there isn't one," he insisted. "It speaks badly for your future as a writer if you can't overcome a little difficulty like that."

I thought for a while. Then I said, "Will you be content with whatever I give you?"

"Yes," he replied.

"You're just like Esau," I said scornfully.

He recrossed his legs. "What's the matter with Esau?" he asked.

"He parted with his birthright for a mess of pottage. I might make you a toad, or a cow, or a sandfly for all you know."

"I don't care what you make me as long as you give me eyes to see, and ears to hear with."

"Well, Pharaoh's daughter—at least—I—am having tea on the beach that day. The chief butler has packed the tea-basket and sent it on before.

After it has gone he remembers he has forgotten to put in the milk, so he pours some into a can, calls one of the Nubian slaves, and tells him to go after them with it as quickly as he can." I broke off and waited.

"Yes," prompted Tony.

"That is you."

"Well?"

"You don't seem to understand."

"What?" said Tony again. He was very exasperating.

"It was not a high-up Nubian. It was quite an inferior one, about a ninth-rate one, and he had to carry it in a can without a lid, and to run all the way, beside being spoken to rudely by the butler."

Tony lifted his hat from his face for a moment. "Did he get there in time?" he asked.

"Yes—Yes."

"Well, what is there for you to grumble at?" he said, dropping his hat into its place again. "Get on, Betty, you're rather slow for a professional, and it's interesting."

I went on: "I am walking along by the edge when all at once I see something odd in the rushes. Look through there, can't you see it?" I pointed to a clump of reeds.

Tony sat up and peered in the direction of my finger.

"Yes, I see it," he said intently. "It's about the size of an almond, and looks like a basket."

"That's it. I am frightfully interested—those who are jealous of me call it curious—about anything I can't see the inside of, and I am just going to step into the water to get it, when one of my maidens interferes and says—'Do be careful, my lady, you will get your feet wet, my lady, and you know how easily you catch cold, my lady.'"

"But you said she had just had her bath. Why should she catch cold if she wet her feet again?"

"You ought to study a Handbook to Health for your own safety. Any baby knows that although it doesn't hurt you to have a bath, you can go right out if you get your feet wet. I would like to marry a lord, Tony."

"There's lots as has done it with less to recommend 'em than you have, my girl," he said heartily. "Stick at it if you're keen for it; it's dogged as does it. But why?"

"To hear myself being called 'my lady' all day and every day. It would be like long, comforting drinks of peppermint cordial. It would be so warm and exhilarating."

"You never can tell. Did you listen to your maiden?"

"Yes, I draw back and say, 'Girl, thou speakest wisely, go *thou* and bring the basket.' Then she brings it to me, and I look inside and see the lovely little Moses lying there asleep. Oh, he is a darling, with the sweetest smile on his face——"

"If you are only the size of a hair-pin, and he is



in proportion, there wouldn't be room for a smile. His face wouldn't be much bigger than a full stop."

"That was true.

"Let's make us all bigger," I suggested.

"If we are as big as fish-knives," said Tony, rapidly calculating, "he could have quite a tidy smile. Shall it be fish-knives?"

"Yes," I said.

He heaved a sigh of relief. "That's better," he said. "I feel a lot more comfortable as a fish-knife than as a hair-pin, but as a ninth-rate eunuch who had to carry lidless milk-cans and be insulted by the butler, I didn't quite see how I dare agitate for a rise. Everything settles itself if you are only content to wait."

"Well, he is just a darling. He's got a lovely olive skin, and a dark little head with tiny black curls, not curls all over—it's more like down, except just round his brow, where it has got damp and twisted into those moist little loops a baby has after it has been to sleep. Oh, and he has his thumb in his mouth! Isn't he sweet!"

"A regular little ripper," said Tony enthusiastically.

"The handmaiden stoops down and picks him up. He howls; she isn't quite used to handling his kind, and naturally when she joggles him, he resents it. I know that's true because in the original it says, 'and the babe wept,'"

Tony gave a squeak. "Like that," he said. I looked at him admiringly.

"You are rather a fine realist," I said.

He acknowledged the tribute with a conscious dignity, and I went on:

"Just as I take him, another of the maidens comes forward and says, 'If you don't come and drink your tea now, my lady, it will be all stewed up to nothink, my lady.' "

"I suppose I am pouring it out and handing it round?" said Tony.

"No, indeed you're not. You are hiding in the papyruses lest I shall become aware of your unworthy presence and be unable to enjoy my tea because of it."

"You do rub it in, Betty," he grumbled. "Couldn't you send a couple of handmaidens to play Moses with me? It's rather stuffy in the papyruses alone."

"You brought it all upon yourself. I told you what you would have to put up with if you insisted upon coming. Well, we all go to tea, but I am so taken up with Moses that I simply can't eat a bite."

"Hooray!" said Tony spitefully.

"I don't want to, even though there are Swiss milk sandwiches, and jam-roll for tea. I am so enraptured that I can't do anything but look, and look, and look at him. And you don't wonder, do you, because he is so adorable?"

"I can't see him," he answered in an obdurate voice. "The papyruses are in the way."

"No, at first you can't, but after a while I notice the rushes waggle and I say, 'Who is yonder?' and they say, 'Please, my lady, it's the very inferior slave that brought the milk, and he's hiding so as not to take your appetite by the sight of his unworthiness,' and I, with my whole nature softened and beautified through love of what lies in my lap, say, 'Lo! It had already departed; bid the wretch come up and stay his miserable body with the crumbs left of the feast.' There isn't much left besides crumbs, because the maidens are fairly hefty ones—and he comes up, but he's so terrified that he spills half his tea down his shirt-front and——"

Tony rose in the majesty of his wrath. "I've stood a lot," he said, "and I'm prepared, knowing you, to stand a lot more, but I'll be shot if I let you make me the sort of bounder who slobbers his tea, without a protest. Choose now. Either I come up and paralyze you with the exquisiteness of my table manners, or else, when I have finished making maps on my shirt-front, I cut you and the brat to pieces with my clasp-knife."

I looked at him out of the tail of my eye, to see how much further I could go. By the set of his shoulders this was evidently a halting-place.

"Don't say brat, Tony," I pleaded.

"Brat," said Tony inflexibly, "small b-r-a-t, brat."

"You don't really spill your tea, you only look nervous."

There was no answer. He settled himself on the cushions, took out his pipe, and having lighted it, puffed away luxuriously.

"When you came closer to me I recognized what a silly mistake I had made, for instead of looking nervous it was a sad expression you had on your face. That's enough, Tony."

He shifted his position, took the pipe out of his mouth, and then put it back without saying a word. I gave in unreservedly.

"And when you got right up I gave a start, and said involuntarily, 'Who is this river god that has come up from the papyrus to intoxicate me with his beauty, and subjugate me with his strength? In truth I am a vanquished queen;' and I bow my head and sob bitterly."

"And I," said Tony magnificently, "touch you on the shoulder and say, 'Woman, these tears are not new to me, but be of good courage, for you please me more than most of the girls who have made fools of themselves over me.'"

"That's very good of you," I said, "but I want Moses' position set right. He's not a brat."

"Brat, rather not," said Tony enthusiastically.

"What is he?"

"Just the little ripper I thought him at first, and I implore you to let me carry his basket to the palace."

"You shall carry him himself," I said gratefully. "Tony, I do love you."

"So I've noticed lately," said Tony; "but why?"

I did not answer. He punted deftly out of the backwater, and we glided slowly along to within sight of the house.

As we drew up to the landing-stage, the Youngest Man approached in his punt with Miss Ferrars. He stood erect, the lean strength of his figure apparent through the thin silk of his shirt. He had the broad shoulders and narrow hips of the best, most athletic type of Englishman, and his arms, bare to above the elbows, looked hard as iron. The waning sunlight fell on his dear grey head, and lighted his face as he turned and smiled down at me, and the need of him suddenly gripped at my heart afresh.

We all got out, and Miss Ferrars and I stood watching while they tied up the boats.

"I am going to quarrel with you, Mr. Marra-ble," she said.

"Why?" asked Tony, stopping in the knot he was tying.

"Because you monopolize Betty so. For the last three days I have wanted her to come out with us, and each time I have been told you had run away with her. You mustn't be so greedy, must he, Kit?"

"No, it isn't quite fair," he said in the same bantering tone.

I looked at Tony apprehensively. Really it was my fault that we had been so much together, and he knew it. He had asked me once or twice why I always preferred him. He is not a bit vain, and was genuinely astonished. Therefore I wondered if he would frankly blame me.

But I need not have wondered, for Tony is a gentleman, and if he felt there were a reason for it, without insisting upon knowing what it was he would do the thing required of him.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

AT the end of a fortnight I went back to town. Mrs. Newton was very pressing in her invitation that I should stay on, but it had got that I couldn't bear it any longer.

It hurt every time the Youngest Man and Miss Ferrars went out together. It hurt to see the perfect confidence that seemed to exist between them, to see how she turned to him and relied upon him in every way as if they already belonged to each other. I used to feel a suffocating pain in my throat every time he went near her or did anything for her, and the more it hurt the more I clung to Tony.

The night before I left there was an informal dance got up at the last moment; just the people in the house and some others who were staying near by. Beatrice, Mr. Vereker and I took it in turns to play. The last dance he and I had danced together. It was his turn to play again. As he got up to go away Tony came cake-walking out into the moonlight.

"Hullo, Betty," he said, "come and have the

next with me. I'm in very good form to-night, bless my dear legs!"

"No, not this one; I want to be quiet for a while."

"All right," said Tony cheerfully, "the one after," and he careered back to find another partner.

It was a hot, still night, with every now and then a faint breeze that made a movement among the leaves like a child stirring in its sleep. The light streamed out into the garden from the drawing-room, lit with soft glowing lamps, and from the dim billiard-room, with its green table standing out in high relief, came the click of cannoning balls. In the distance you could hear the far-away sound of the weir rushing and tumbling, but down in the river below the silence was only broken by the splash of a passing oar, or the grit of a punt pole as it struck the gravel bed. I sat motionless in the seat under the great sycamore trees.

The dignity of this wonderful peace covered the whole world like a mantle and left me naked. It spread over it like a protecting brooding wing and left me defenceless. It held out compassionate arms and called tenderly saying, "You foolish child, stop crying and beating your hands, and come to me, for nothing else can give you rest."

But who, with the red blood rushing in his veins, and life unsatisfied, wants rest? If an athlete had a race to run, if a singer had a song to sing, would



either be content to slip into forgetfulness till he had found expression for his desires? And is there any real peace without forgetfulness?

I was on the wrong side of the Door, and I would have to beat my hands and cry out till it had opened for me, or till I got tired.

There was a figure in the doorway of the billiard-room. It was the Youngest Man. He stood for a moment on the threshold and then came towards me.

"All alone?" he said.

"Yes," I said, "it is too hot to dance right through the night."

He dropped into the chair beside me.

"You don't mind this?" He held out his cigar. I shook my head.

"Where is the faithful one?" he went on quizzingly.

"Whom do you mean?"

"What, are there so many!" he laughed.

"I don't recognize any one."

"Then you are very ungrateful and don't deserve such devotion."

"If you mean Tony," I said, "I agree with you that he is more than good. But he has the spirit of a Knight Errant and would devote himself to any lady in need without thought of his own wishes."

"All the same I don't think he is doing much violence to his feelings," said the Youngest Man.

"And also I have not noticed that this lady is in great need. I have only found that she is a much more difficult person to get near, when one lives in the same house with her, than when one only sees her occasionally. Unless, of course, one happens to be specially blest, which I evidently am not."

"Tony used to give medicine to my dolls and perform operations on them when we were seven years old," I said, defending the situation. It would be quite unfair to Tony for the Youngest Man to imagine he was the least bit in love with me, however gratifying to my vanity the idea might be.

"When you and Tony were at your dolls," said the Youngest Man slowly and stopping to flick the ash from his cigar, "I was in my wig, alternately persecuting and abetting criminals." He drew a long breath and straightened himself. "It is difficult to remember that one doesn't stop still."

"It is ridiculous for you to talk of yourself as if you were old," I said sharply. "It is not years that make the man."

"They make him think, though," he replied quietly. "I keep forgetting what generation I belong to till some one like Tony comes along and reminds me."

I moved impatiently. "I hate you to talk like that," I said.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because it makes me feel so far off."

The music had stopped. He leaned forward, looking at me intently.

"Tell me how you mean 'far off'?"

"Oh," I said, pressing my hands together, "I don't know, but it makes me——" Then I stopped. I was going to say it made me feel as if I didn't *belong*, but then I remembered I didn't and had no right to think that I did. Whenever I had felt more than usually near him he had always said something about the difference in years between us, and I wondered if he had thought that I might be getting to care where it could not be returned. My cheeks blazed at the thought.

"Well?" he asked again.

I laughed. "It makes me feel of so little importance. Just when I think I have climbed up to your plane and should be recognized as an equal you give me a gentle little pat on the head and send me back to the nursery again. It is not nice of you."

Tony came towards us with Miss Ferrars. "Here she is," he said. Then he caught sight of the Youngest Man. "We came to take you to supper," he said. "I thought you were alone."

"Let us all go together," I said, getting up. As we walked towards the house the Youngest Man turned to Beatrice, "Are you dancing the next with any one, Trix?"

"No," she said, "but I think I ought to play it,"

"That's all right," said Tony easily. "I heard Vereker say he had hurt his foot; let him do it."

"Will you have it with me, then?"

She nodded, and we all went in to the supper-room together. And I was wicked and unjust enough to feel a sudden fury of anger against her because she had been asked and I had not.

After the next dance was over Tony and I went out and sat on the steps of the landing-stage. For a while neither of us spoke. Tony was very busy throwing stones at the reflection of the moon in the water; I was tired and did not want to talk.

"Betty," said Tony at last, "what's up?"

I started.

"How—why?" I asked quickly.

"There is something the matter. Others perhaps wouldn't notice it because they don't know you, but I do, and I feel somehow as if you are unhappy. I don't want to pry, but if it's anything I could help you with you know you have only to tell me."

I shook my head. No one could help me.

"It isn't money, is it?" he went on jerkily. "I've got whips of it, and I hope you wouldn't be such a little fool as to make yourself miserable about some paltry debt, when a word would put it straight. You know what the matter would feel about it."

Oh, there is a wonderful husband for some girl some day in Tony!

I rested my chin in my hand and stared into the water.

"It is true," I said, "I am very, very miserable, but neither you nor any one else can help me. If it were money I would come to you at once, but it is nothing so easy as that. Only, Tony," I said, "it is a great comfort to me to be with you even though I can't tell you. It makes me not feel quite so lonely."

"Poor old Betty," he said gently.

We sat for a long, long time without speaking.

"We had better go in," I said at last.

He got up and we walked slowly along the tow-path into the garden. Just before we got to the gate he stopped and put his hand on my shoulder.

"I don't know how good or bad things are," he said, "but keep a stiff upper lip through it, Betty, and perhaps it will come all right in the end. And remember, till you have no more need of me, use me as much as you want."

It is easier to be brave when you are lonely than when some one is being tender over you. I felt a sob rise in my throat as I took his hand and held it fast.

"Oh, Tony!" I said.

## CHAPTER XLV.

I STAYED with Agnes for two or three days after I returned to town, then I went back to the flat. It had been thoroughly cleaned by the woman, but dust lay thick over the piano and the book-shelves, and the things on the little silver table were tarnished and dull. It seemed dead and silent after the gay house I had left. I opened all the windows, dusted the furniture, polished the silver and brass until it almost talked, and filled the room with the freshest, vividest flowers I could buy. Then I put the elephant into his old corner on the sofa, and sat down beside him, feeling better.

All at once it occurred to me that I had not been to the Club since I came back. I had written from Taplow telling them not to forward any more letters to me there, and it was just possible something might have come since from the publisher's. I went to the telephone and rang up the Club. The porter said there were three letters waiting for me. My heart jumped. I told him to send them at once. Then I felt I couldn't wait all night. I made him describe them. One was a big envelope with initials on it. The initials were the pub-

lisher's. There was also a packet. I told him not to send them, I would call for them myself.

I dressed feverishly, put on my hat and went down the stairs. Half way down I felt sick and turned back. It could only be a refusal. I had never heard of any one getting their book accepted the first time, and just now I didn't feel quite equal to a rebuff. I would wait until the morning. I went back to the flat.

For a quarter of an hour I sat staring in front of me, then I got up, went out again, and walked mechanically up to the King's Road. A hansom was dawdling along by the curb. I hailed it and got in. During the drive I suffered torments of ecstasy and despair. At one moment I was in a heaven of happiness to think of its success. Of course it had been taken—and with open arms. It was too good not to find an appreciator in the discerning person to whom I had sent it. I saw myself leaping into celebrity at a bound, and borne along to prosperity by an adoring public.

Then I remembered that there had been a packet as well. It was the manuscript returned. What a fool I was! Out of the thousands of books written every year I had expected mine to ring the bell with the first shot. And Thackeray had hawked his *Vanity Fair* to every publisher in London. With that thought a gleam of comfort came. I was not handicapped in the way he was. People might think me clever up to a certain point, but no one

could, however much they liked or disliked me, accuse me of being a genius. I had the advantage of him there.

When I got to the Club I didn't care one way or the other. I walked up the steps and asked indifferently at the office for my letters.

I looked at the packet first. It was too small for the manuscript, and had a green cover where mine was purple. I pulled it out of its envelope. It was a list of publications. Then I opened the other envelope. Inside was a letter from the publisher making me an offer.

I turned and went slowly into the smoking-room. As I read the letter all the blood in my body seemed to be at my heart. Now it had rushed away again and was tearing through me, beating in my face and singing in my ears. Everything and everybody seemed a long, long way off. I spoke to some one, but I don't know what she said.

At last I had done something! Something that had been thought of value by its judges, something that was going to step out of its obscurity, and take its kicks and its ha'pence with the best of them.

I had done this thing. I, who began my school career at the age of seven, and ended it at sixteen with nothing but a prize for French pronunciation, and a sheaf of bad reports to mark the flight of time. I, who during those years had sat steadfastly, faithfully at the foot of every class I took it in turn to disorganize. I, at the mention of whose



name every teacher closed her eyes and flung up her hands. I, who had lived in one continuous terror of the just punishments I so systematically invited.

Yet it wasn't humility or modesty that made me so overcome. I don't think in my worst, most despairing moments I ever really doubted my right to succeed. It was rather that I had grown so used to regarding myself as a graceless failure, a jesting vagabond, that any other condition, however brilliant I might or might not be, would seem impossible. I simply had a genius for getting up a certain distance and falling back with a thump. I had laughed and wept through my school days. I had laughed and wept through my love affairs, and I would go on laughing and weeping through the life I had got to make for myself. I would get very few pennies, because unless I could work in my own way I couldn't work at all, and as far as I could see the quickly successful people generally used recipes. But although I wanted pennies badly sometimes, I didn't want them as badly as the things I would have to give in exchange for them. Now it was different. Something had suddenly happened that altered the colour of everything. I went to the telephone to tell Agnes. Then a thought struck me. Perhaps the Youngest Man was in town. I had always meant that he should be the very first to hear. It was his right. He had sat so patiently and listened so unflinchingly

whenever I had tried anything on him before sending it out, that even though he belonged to another woman, and would only take a friendly interest in the result, I still wanted that to be his.

I rang up his Club. He was there. The man went away to call him. Presently I heard his voice at the other end.

"I'm glad it is you," he said. "I was just writing to know when I might call."

"I want you to come to-night," I said. "I have something to tell you."

"What is it, news about yourself?"

"Yes."

"Tell me now, I am curious."

"I can't tell you through the telephone."

He laughed. "Is it as important as all that?"

"Yes, can you come?"

He seemed to be considering. "If I may come late," he replied. "I've got a man dining with me, and I shall have to get rid of him first."

"Very well, come late. I want to tell you at once. Good-bye." I rang off.

## CHAPTER XLVI

AT ten o'clock the door bell rang. I went into the little hall, and led the Youngest Man into the sitting-room.

He looked round, then went and sat down beside the elephant.

"It seems a very long time since I was here before," he said, taking it on to his knee and pulling thoughtfully at its ears.

"It is a long time," I said, "and wonderful things have happened since then. When did you come back from Taplow?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And how was every one?" I was longing to tell him about the book, but somehow he didn't help me. It was almost as if he didn't care about hearing, and I felt chilled.

"Very well, but you will have later news than I can give?" He looked at me keenly.

"I had a letter from Tony this morning," I said, "but it isn't quite the same thing to hear in a letter as it is to hear from some one who has just left them. And they were all so good to me, so very good," I went on, thinking of what would have been a lovely visit if only things had been different.

"Every one in the house seemed in good health and spirits when I left," he continued. "Mrs. and Miss Carlton Smyth went up to town the day after you did. Dick Vereker came away with me," he paused a moment, "and I think I may tell you, although it is not announced yet, but my cousin Beatrice is going to marry Colonel Ashburton."

I was standing looking out of the window. Down below in the street a barrel-organ was playing, "I Wouldn't Leave My Little Wooden Hut for You," and two tattered children were dancing hilariously in the gaslight. The children of the King's Road and its tributaries never go to bed in the summer.

The band round my heart snapped suddenly. I answered something without turning my head. Something about being very glad and hoping she would be happy, and how I had liked her. But I couldn't look at him because of the naked joy that I knew was flaming out of my eyes.

Was there ever a tune as beautiful as "I Wouldn't Leave My Little Wooden Hut for You"? Were there ever children more dear and sweet than those brats flinging their toeless boots in the dust below?

Dear God! I wanted to put my arms round the whole world at once because it was so lovely. He was not mine, but, oh, he was not hers!

The voice of the Youngest Man came to me from a long distance,

"Well, Dreamer, what is it?"

I turned round slowly. "What is what?" I asked.

"What is the piece of news that I was to hear? Is it so absorbing that you have no room in your mind for even the telling of it to humble outsiders?"

"Who is an outsider?" I was still half-blind with the light.

"Well, I rather feel at this moment as if I were. Tell me. I am waiting."

Then I awoke. He was standing erect, his head bent forward ever so little, and a questioning smile upon his face.

That my book had been accepted—what a little thing it seemed now!

"Can't you guess what it is?" I stood before him with my hands clasped, and smiled back at him.

"I think I can, but I would rather you told me," he answered, and for all his calmness there was a suppressed something about him I had never noticed before. "It must be something very good to have given you those shining eyes."

"It did make me very happy," I said.

"Well?"

I did not speak for a moment, then I said slowly, "I have had an offer for my book."

He drew his breath sharply, suddenly.

"Was that all?" he asked quickly.

"All!" I said blankly. "Why, is not that a great thing? I thought you would be so very glad."

His eyes were shining now. "I am very glad," he said, "and it is wonderful, but I had been thinking of something else, and it seemed small in comparison."

"What could you have thought?" I asked in surprise. He had surely known how much I wanted the book to be a success.

"Something that, if it has not already come, will not be long in coming, I am thinking." There was just the slightest shadow in his voice that made me glance up quickly.

"What is it that you speak of?" I asked it impatiently.

He looked down at me long and searchingly.

"Dear child," he said, "do you think the finest thing in the world is writing a book?"

"No, it is not the finest thing, but if it is all you've got you must make it the finest thing."

"That will not be so for you," he said. "You will not write many more books or need to make it the finest thing in the world."

"Why?"

"Because you are the kind of a woman who inevitably marries. You were made for it, and no other life would ever satisfy you."

"Every woman who is made for marriage does

not find the man she wants, and every woman does not marry just for the sake of being married."

"There is that boy," he said abruptly, as if he were following out his own thoughts. "He is very fond of you, and from what I saw of him he would be very splendid to the woman he cared for."

"Tony does not want me that way," I said rather wearily; "and if he did I don't want him. I love him, but I am not in love with him, which makes all the difference."

I bit my lip, and turned away to hide the tear that would roll down my cheek, no matter how hard I tried to keep it back. It had been an exciting night, and now that it was over I felt desperately tired, and, in spite of all the joy of it, very much alone.

"Is there any one that does matter?" The Youngest Man spoke quietly, stilly.

I did not answer. He came nearer.

"Betty!" he said, and his voice was almost a whisper—"Betty!"

I did not stir from where I was, but I turned round and faced him. Neither of us spoke. He leaned forward, and I moved slowly towards him. He stretched out his hands and caught me by the wrists, never taking his eyes from mine. Then he drew me to him and bent over me, pressing my head back with his hand.

"Could I give what you want?" he said, still in a whisper. "Tell me, Betty!"

I could not speak, but I put up my hand and touched his face and his dear grey hair. I felt his lips on my mouth, and I closed my eyes.

Oh, but is it safe to be so happy?

THE END





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